University of Alberta

Manufacturing Dissent? The cultural politics and communicative strategy of the Adbusters Media Foundation

by

Anne Winkler ©

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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INTRODUCTION

> *Freedom of the press is limited to those who own one.*
>
> A.J. Liebling (1904-1963)

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the rapid dismantling of the welfare state on a global scale, the capitalist world economy appears currently to be not only taken-for-granted but also ordinary and without alternatives. The late 1970s and the 1980s saw the revival of an ideology whose death writers such as Karl Polanyi[1] had declared after experiencing the horrors of the Great Depression and First and Second World Wars. Ideas based on classical economic theory made their comeback in the form of neo-liberalism. While initially only conservative politicians such as the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the American President Ronald Reagan heralded its cause, today all types of government around the globe are chanting neo-liberal mantras and are prescribing and ascribing to privatization, spending cuts, tax cuts and the freeing the market of governmental constraints.

A new type of social movement arose to respond to the neo-liberal attack from above in the form of the so-called anti-globalization, or anti-corporate globalization movement. Most visible have been in the Zapatista uprising and large-scale protests in Seattle, Genoa, and Quebec City. While single-issue movements converging on topics related to identity and the environment marked the 1980s in the West, movements of the 1990s and the new century are coming together largely on the basis of concerns about global economic, political and social relations. These movements are questioning the very foundation of how life in large parts of the world is organized. Some of these new movements are concentrating on overcoming the inability of the New Left to develop alternatives by looking to cultural means to change power structures. Prominent among these attempts to alter dominant signs and their meaning stands the Vancouver based nonprofit Adbusters Media Foundation (AMF).

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[1] See Karl Polanyi's The Great Transformation (1944).

Activities of the AMF include the running of the website "Culture Jammer's Headquarters," as well as orchestrating social marketing campaigns such as "Buy Nothing Day," "TV Turnoff Week," "Unbrand America," and the "BlackSpot Sneaker." The organization also operates the PowerShift Advertising Agency, a service that designs social marketing strategies for non-profit groups. Perhaps the most visible aspect of the organization has been its *Adbusters Magazine: Journal of the Mental Environment*, published since the summer of 1989. With a circulation of 120,000 and subscribers in 60 countries, availability at mega-bookstores such as *Chapters*, countless media awards, and object of discussion in the international popular press, this magazine is gaining recognition that few activist publications can rival.

In part, the activities of the AMF represent a reaction to what Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky describe in their book *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. Here, they develop a propaganda model that

> focuses on the inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public. (Herman, Chomsky 2002, 2)

Sharing these views about the state of mass communication, the AMF represents itself as an organization for and by activists that is involved in efforts to build resistance against consumer culture, making mass communication its battleground. Its publications and its corresponding website popularize adbusting and culture jamming as means of achieving what their authors term 'cultural revolution.' [2]

Over the course of its existence, the AMF has received much criticism and praise for its form of opposition to consumer culture. Some hail it as a force that offers inspiration in a fight for a more just world, while others see it as the commodification of cultural resistance. Regardless of the efficacy of its project, the AMF represents an ideal case for the study of cultural resistance, for its many campaigns, its magazine, and other activities enables an in-depth analysis of a vibrant and powerful movement that is often fluid and ever changing.

---

[2] Since October/November 2000 the header of the manifesto published in *Adbusters* reads: "Cultural Revolution is our business."

Many discussions about the AMF in the academic and non-academic literature present one-sided views that lack analytical depth and consequently provide little insight into the origins and repercussions of the apparent conflicts the activities and the philosophy of the organization embody (see Klein 2000; Rutherford 2000; Bordwell 2002; Mathew 2002; Rumbo 2002). They fail to place its project historically, a shortcoming that is most pronounced in terms of locating it within long and short term intellectual and cultural currents. For example, in his book *Endless propaganda: The advertising of public goods (2000)*, Paul Rutherford refers to the AMF and culture jamming in the past tense, therefore deeming this form of resistance irrelevant as well as having little impact. He argues that the lack of money and power has prevented the AMF from getting its message into the mainstream.

> The most subversive propaganda appeared only on the fringes of society: posters on the street, a late night TV slot, maybe a part of a newspaper or TV story, in little magazines and university classrooms, on a few websites, and sometimes in art galleries. Otherwise, it was lost in the profusion of other messages that bombarded the population daily. (Rutherford 2000, 173)

Approaching the study of the AMF and other progressive initiatives from the perspective of success does little to understand them and the historical role they play. Moreover, this approach fails to make room for the inspiration, process, or potential contained within such projects.

While Rutherford is too quick to dismiss the AMF, in "Jamming Culture: Adbusters' Hip Media Campaign against Consumerism," Marilyn Bordwell celebrates it without many qualifications, thereby missing the complexity. She argues that "Lasn and his colleagues ... succeed ... in getting people to think outside the lines, to confront their own consumption and the very institution that promotes it – advertising" (2002, 253) Although the AMF presents itself as pursuing these goals, it is precisely these claims that a critical analysis of the group has to question.

The variance in the appraisal of the AMF reflects how the organization represents itself. In the continuous process of building an identity for itself, the AMF constructs narratives that are multiple and frequently contradictory. Kalle Lasn, founder of the AMF, embraces the incongruous elements in the organization's projects. In an interview he comments:

> There are lots of people who confront me on this and say, "why don't you walk your talk?" Every one of us is an incredible contradiction. We are all caught in this post-modern hall of mirrors. But people who say, 'No, you have to be pure. How can you do this? How can you do that?' I think they are not being effective. What is my choice? That I'm not going to publish my book because I refuse to give it to Rupert Murdoch? I think you have to get used to the fact that we are walking, talking contradictions, all of us. And this is what culture is right now, a very contradictory culture we live in right now.
> Interviewee: They allow you to have the widest broadcast of your message.
> Yes, but not only that. We all have to play footsie with the enemy. This has been true of every revolution. The revolutionaries have interacted in very profound ways with the enemy. And that may well be the only way to pull the enemy down, to play this sort Trojan Horse game.
> (Rosenberg 2001)

The interviewer's and Lasn's statements not only allude to criticism the organization faces from sources as varied as fellow culture jammers, anti-corporate globalization activists and academics. They also point to the difficulty that lies in arriving at a critical understanding of a project such as the AMF's.

Asa Wettergren's conception of the AMF makes this problem even clearer. In her analysis of the organization, she claims that "inner tensions, conflicts, and ambivalences displayed within [culture jamming] texts ... represent the dynamics of a movement in formation, as well as conflicts, tensions, and ambivalences of our time" (Wettergren 2003, 28). Here, Wettergren takes the contradictions for granted, failing to problematize them. She thereby turns away from important questions, questions the AMF itself fails to pose. They include the following: What are the sources of the tension, conflicts, and ambivalence? How do they affect the cultural politics and the communicative strategy of the AMF? Do they negate the AMF's proclaimed project? Is the AMF proposing a new form of rhetoric? In this thesis I engage with these questions by asking: What are the sources of the tension and ambivalence contained within the AMF project and how do they undermine it? This inquiry allows me to also pose a much broader question: What obstacles do subversive projects face in the context of the commodity form?

Chapter 1 examines aspects of the AMF's self-representation. The dominant themes I describe here highlight the incongruities of these narratives. They include the AMF's understanding of itself as being inspired by other subversive initiatives, such as the Situationist International. However, the AMF fails to take on the significant insights of these projects. Furthermore, this section demonstrates that while the AMF presents itself as a powerful socio-cultural agent of change and as pursuing a new form of cultural politics, it falls short of formulating a communicative strategy to correspond to it.

The second chapter looks at how the AMF is situated within formal debates about consumption. It shows that the organization's overemphasis on consumption paired with seeing itself as functioning outside of Left and Right wing ideologies mirrors tendencies within contemporary Cultural Studies and the Sociology of Culture. This part of the thesis also problematizes the overwhelming corporate control over discursive spaces, such as mass media and public space, and addresses issues related to cooptation within the context of consumerism.

The focus of Chapter 3 is the contradictions within the AMF's project from the perspective of the interaction between the media the AMF uses and the messages they convey, between form and content. For example, by using images that function like advertisements for its anti-consumerist messages, the AMF is unable to separate itself from the role of ads as consumerist discourses. At the same time, however, the images the organization produce and disseminate also represent a powerful communication tool. I conduct an analysis of a series of four images from *Adbusters* magazine to illustrate the potential of AMF visuals, but also to show the multiple layers, tensions, and contradictions contained within them.

The aim of the fourth chapter is to demonstrate that the production of culture has to play an important role within culturally subversive projects. The ideas of Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor W. Adorno I present here not only exemplify the disparity in the work of the Frankfurt School, but they also provide a framework to investigate the complexity and the contradictory aspects of the AMF.

Although the AMF's formulations about the causes and manifestations of consumerism parallel Horkheimer and Adorno's ideas, the implications the group and the theorists draw from these observations vary greatly. By examining these differences and juxtaposing their conclusions, I demonstrate the difficulty that lies in staging subversive projects within the context of the commodity form as well as ways in which the AMF undercuts its own project. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno's ideas make clear that there can be no such thing as a no-logo or anti-logo and that in fact, publicity is a space immune to negation. Consequently, the AMF's attempt to brand itself with its logo "BlackSpot" signifies, I argue, the group's inability to truly oppose consumerism in they way it claims to.

Benjamin lays out the role the producer of culture has to take in creative revolutionary work. He argues that though new technologies and media can represent important forms for cultural resistance projects, they are subject to bourgeois appropriation and commodification. Self-identification as producer and her/his active transformation of production processes have the potential to counteract this tendency. A Benjaminian perspective shows, I argue, that although the AMF begins to engage with pressing issues of our time and attempts to do so by communicating with the most powerful media available to us today, it is caught up invariably within mechanisms that replicate contemporary dominant systems that oppress.

CHAPTER 1: THE ADBUSTERS MEDIA FOUNDATION – AN OVERVIEW

This chapter is concerned largely with how the AMF represents itself as an activist group. I investigate how the organization communicates with the public and creates and (re)defines its character and purpose by examining the narratives that make the organization what it is.

As the AMF's founder, its de facto spokesperson, and editor-in-chief of the organization's magazine *Adbusters*, Kalle Lasn stands at the helm of the foundation; he and the identity of the AMF are intertwined inextricably. With the publication of his book *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge – and Why we Must* (1999), Lasn declared himself king of culture jammers. This bible of culture jamming not only describes a social and cultural movement but it also provides the raison d'être of the AMF, offering a concreteness that the organization's website and magazine lacks. The close relationship between the book, Lasn, and the AMF is particularly apparent in the book's content. The manifesto contained in the *Adbusters* issues Winter 2000 through January/February 2002 appears on the fist page of the book. On the last page, the same manifesto appears once again. Here, the reader also finds contact and subscription information for the AMF website and *Adbusters Magazine*. The book is available directly from the organization's website. With a $100 donation, "friends of the foundation" receive, among other items, a copy of *Culture Jam*.

Because the identity of Lasn and the AMF are evidently linked, in my effort to describe and analyze the AMF's goals, vision and place in contemporary subversive struggles, I rely heavily on Lasn's written and spoken words.

THE CONUNDRUM OF DEFINING ITSELF

In the continuous process of building an identity for itself, the AMF constructs narratives that often lack homogeneity, clarity, and consistency. Even in instances where formulations exist that should indicate precisely the AMF stance, such as in the case of manifestos, slogans and campaigns, its position is difficult to pinpoint. The organization's manifesto[3] in particular represents an exemplary instance of a record of the struggle that is involved in defining a movement from within. In its history, the manifesto moves from specific and exclusionary formulations of identity and goals, to becoming increasingly broad and inclusionary, but also less precise in its vision. For example, while in the summer of 1997 the foundation saw itself as "a global network of artists, activist, educators, guerrilla tacticians," by October/November 2000 it defined itself as follows:

> We are a loose global network of artists, writers, environmentalists, ecological economists, media-literacy teachers, reborn Lefties, ecofeminists, downshifters, high school shit-disturbers, campus rabble-rousers, incorrigibles, malcontents and green entrepreneurs. We are idealists, anarchists, guerrilla tacticians, pranksters, neo-Luddites, poets, philosophers and punks.

The AMF continues to use this formulation.

Although the exact definition of its objectives in the manifesto changes frequently, three examples from its history demonstrate the never ceasing reevaluation of how the organization sees itself. More specifically, it chronicles how the AMF has moved from particular goals to general ones, increasingly attempting to appeal to a larger audience by broadening its objective. In the summer 1997 issue of *Adbusters* the manifesto reads:

> Our mission is to take on the archetypal mind polluters – Marlboro, Absolut, McDonald's, Calvin Klein, Nissan, Time-Warner, Disney – and beat them at their own game; to uncool their billion-dollar images with uncommercials on television, subvertisements in magazines and anti-ads right next to theirs in the urban landscape; to take control over the role that the tobacco, alcohol, food, fashion, automobile and culture industries play in our lives, and to set new agendas in their industries.

Between January/February 2001 and July/August 2001, the AMF describes its goals as follows:

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[3] Manifestos began to appear in *Adbusters* magazine with the Summer 1997 issue.

> We see ourselves as one of the most significant social movements of the next 20 years. Our aim is to topple existing power structures and forge a major rethinking of the way we will live in the 21st century. We believe culture jamming will become to our era what civil rights was to the '60s, what feminism was to the '70s, what environmental activism was to the '80s. It will alter the way we live and think. It will change the way information flows, the way institutions wield power, the way TV stations are run, the way food, fashion, automobile, sports, music and culture industries set their agendas. Above all, it will change the way we interact with the mass media and the way meaning is produced in our society.

From November/December 2002 on, the manifesto includes this description of goals:

> Our aim is to topple existing power structures and forge a major rethinking of the way we will live in the 21st century. We want to change the way information flows, the way institutions wield power, the way TV stations are run, the way food, fashion, automobile, sports, music and culture industries set their agendas. Above all, we want to change the way we interact with the mass media and the way meaning is produced in our society.

Even in its newest incarnation, the manifesto makes no clear statement about what the AMF project is. What at are these "existing power structures" the AMF opposes? More important, what kind of "rethinking" does the organization propose? What is the problem with how "information flows, the way institutions wield power, ..."?

WE'RE NOT: COOL, SLACKERS, ACADEMICS, FEMINISTS, LEFTIES[4]

The AMF defines itself as being situated beyond current and historical struggles. Lasn comments: "In the information age, we need information rights. Race, gender, and environmental rights were fought for and won in previous eras. Now I think we'll have to fight another great battle to make the right to communicate a fundamental human right of every person on earth" (Jensen 2001). This statement illustrates that the AMF idealizes its position, implying that they are the involved in the struggles that subsumes all others. Lasn is particularly critical of left wing thinking. "[N]o longer are lefties fighting the problem, they are the problem, and if we're going to build an effective new social movement, we're going to work not with them but around them" (Lasn 1999,120-121). In an interview, he also comments:

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[4] Taken from Lasn's section headings in *Culture Jam*.

> We feel that one of the reasons we are not making enough progress right now is that most of the activists that did a lot of work in the 70s and 80s are still caught in this left-wing rhetoric that is now outdated. The old left-wing/right wing fight isn't the fight now; it is more of a straight-ahead, ecological battle over who will control the media. It transcends left and right. (Hyman 1995)

This anti-left stance appears particularly incongruous considering that AMF materials are filled with communist rhetoric. To the question whether the AMF is trying to be unbiased by taking a neither a left or right wing perspective, Lasn answers

> No, we are not trying to be unbiased. We are trying to be completely biased in the direction that we believe in. But it is not the old left-wing/right-wing thing, which we think is jaded and totally out of date. People who are still in that kind of fight should jump out of it and wake up to the 90s. (ibid.)

In other words, Lasn claims that the AMF is devising a new kind of cultural-political communication, even a new ideology. But in whose interest is this rhetoric formulated?

NAMING THE ENEMY: THE US AND LARGE CORPORATIONS

The AMF represents the culprit behind consumerism in a nearly singular and unified fashion. It is not the ideology of capitalism, but rather the US and its corporations that embody that which needs to be opposed. For example, one of the AMF's major campaigns is "Unbrand America," the initiative behind the "BlackSpot" and the "BlackSpot Sneaker" projects. The AMF corporate flag (see fig. 1.1), a copy of the American flag that carries corporate logos instead of stars, is perhaps the greatest symbolic manifestation of this narrow focus. By concentrating largely on the US government and corporations, the AMF shuts down a broader debate about global relations of production, exchange, consumption, and consequently possibilities for global solidarity. At the same time, the organization fails to critically engage in what it is about the US that makes it the enemy. Ironically, although the AMF represents itself as anti-American, its content is predominantly American, containing few hints that it is a Canadian publication. Even the spelling is American.

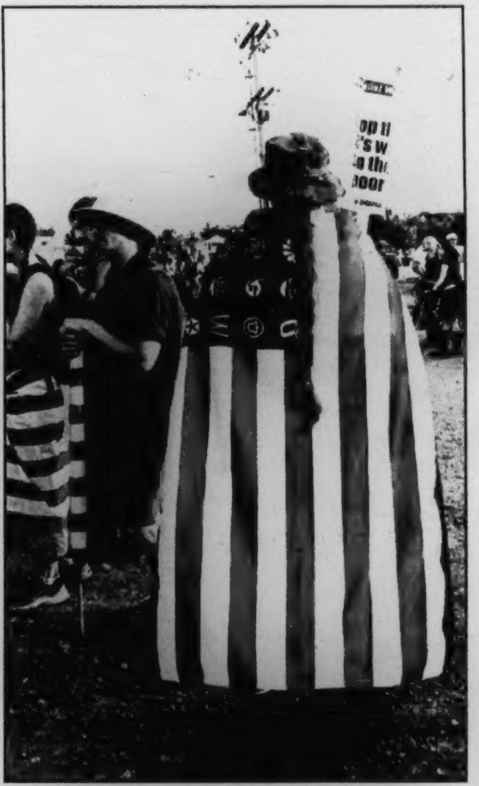

Fig. 1.1 – AMF Corporate Flag - Protesters at G8 meeting, Calgary, August 2002 (photograph taken by author of this thesis)

THE AMF WITHIN HISTORICAL CURRENTS

The AMF situates itself within particular historical currents of the past, present, and future, thereby constructing narratives that give it historical validity. Within the context of contemporary social movements, it aligns itself in part with the so-called "anti-globalization" movement. Lasn describes this link:

> One of our best jams so far happened in November 1999, during the "Battle in Seattle" – the protests against the World Trade Organization. We produced a powerful sixty-second spot questioning globalization, which aired repeatedly on CNN As the protests unfolded, and on dozens of community and public-access stations in the weeks leading up to

> the protests. A radio version aired on many college radio stations. We also put up three 'System Error' billboards in Seattle to inspire the protesters as they marched by. And activists all over the world who didn't make it to Seattle visited our Culture Jammers Headquarters on the Internet. It was very exciting and a great example, I think, of a new kind of pincers strategy that combines street action with sophisticated mass-media thrusts. (Jensen 2001)

At the same time, however, the AMF criticizes the movement, implying a superiority of their own approach, one that overcomes its limitations.

> I think we need to tackle some of these issues [of corporate globalization], define what they are, and then promote them with the same kind of vigor that the corporations use to promote their issues. ... When I see protest after protest leading up to Genoa and how those coalition's messages aren't coming through, it forces me to ask if it isn't simply how the media is framing us but that we ourselves don't know what the issues are. ... At the moment, quite apart from the media just wanting to show the broken windows and violence, we actually don't have anything to say! Of course, in a sense we do, but there are not enough people wrestling with the big ideas behind our movement and explaining them to the public. (Pickerel 2002)

In an effort to connect itself to the past, the legacy of Debord and McLuhan form an integral part of the AMF's identity. The name and thoughts of these figures appear frequently in interviews, books, webpages, and magazines. For example, among the people to whom Lasn dedicates his book stand Marshal McLuhan and Guy Debord, both of whom he identifies as his teachers. A Marshall McLuhan quote introduces the four chapters of his book. More broadly, Lasn credits McLuhan as describing mass-culture, while he sees Debord as having developed effective ways to break out of it (Lasn 1999, 102). I comment more on the influence of Debord and the Situationists on the AMF below.

Considering Lasn's reverence of McLuhan, the AMF manifesto title "Cultural Revolution is our Business" undoubtedly makes reference to

Marshall McLuhan's book *Culture is our Business*. In this work, McLuhan uses advertising images to explicate "the patterns of force of ads that shape and mirror our time" (McLuhan 1970, 8). He asserts that "business and culture have become interchangeable in the new information environment" (1970, 7). From this statement it follows that for McLuhan, the reversal of the title phrase also holds and that the book could have been titled "Business is our Culture." This inversion is significant, since McLuhan is highly critical of corporate ownership of mass media. He writes:

> Once we surrendered our senses and nervous systems to the private manipulation of those who would try to benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and nerves, we don't really have any rights left. Leasing our eyes and ears and nerves to commercial interests is like handing over the common speech to a private corporation, or like giving the earth's atmosphere to a company as a monopoly. (McLuhan 1965, 68)

He goes on to argue that to a degree we have already done so:

> Archimedes once said, "Give me a place to stand and I will move the world." Today he would have pointed to our electric media and said, "I will stand on your eyes, your ears, your nerves, and your brain, and the world will move in any tempo or pattern I choose." We have leased these "places to stand" to private corporations. (ibid.)

McLuhan's turning around of "culture is our business" to "business is our culture," in conjunction with his critical views of corporate media point to insights the AMF fails to take on in a meaningful way: the detrimental impact capital has on all culture, not just media and that business and culture are intertwined inextricably.

CULTURE JAMMING AND MEME WARFARE

The central component of the AMF's philosophy and practice, one that is broadly anti-consumerist in nature, is culture jamming. The San Francisco audio-collage band Negativeland coined the term "culture jamming" in 1984 and defined it as the reworking of billboards with the intent to encourage viewers to consider the original message (Klein 2000, 281). For the AMF it represents much more. "Culture jamming is, at root, just a metaphor for stopping the flow of spectacle long enough to adjust your set, breaking the syntax, and replacing it with a new one. The new syntax carries the instructions for a whole new way of being in the world" (Lasn 1999, 101).

The AMF has appropriated the term culture jamming for its own purpose and to identify itself. For example, the url www.culturejammers.org leads directly to the organization's website. The AMF uses the term culture jam to formulate a distinct theory of social change on which it bases its goals. Lasn's words reflects this vision:

> I have a grandiose plan. My dream as a culture jammer is that a small group of people with a limited budget could have the power to choose a megabrand we don't like for valid reasons and uncool that brand, to show that we the people as a civil society have the power to keep a corporation honest. Now that would be something that would actually redefine capitalism. (BlackSpot sneaker 2004)

Lasn sets apart culture jammers from other 'downshifters.' "For jammers downshifting is not simply a way of adjusting our routines; it's adopting a lifestyle of defiance against a culture run amok, a revolutionary step toward a fundamental transformation of the American way of life" (Lasn 1999, 171).

Part of the work of culture jamming lies in destroying the value of a commercial brand. A brand is a name and/or symbol that signals the source of a product and differentiates it from competitors. Brand value is a significant contributor to the capital value of a company, and the value of many major corporations' brand far exceeds the value of its physical assets. Building positive brand equity is a long and costly process, and for some organizations, like Ford and Tommy Hilfiger, it has become the focus of their activities. Culture jammers use the same tools corporations use to build a brand to damage it.

Culture jamming and the subversion of the image draws heavily on ideas developed by the Situationists in the 1960s. This group of social theorists with links to older art movements of Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism sought to blur the distinction between art and life, and called for a constant transformation of lived experience. Guy Debord, self proclaimed leader of the Situationists, first articulated the power of a simple "détournement" (diversion), the lifting out of its context of an image, message or artifact, to create new meaning. The Situationists used "détournement" in films, art, their journal and posters as a form of social critique, or a critique of what Debord called the "spectacle." In his book, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Debord lays out his theory of the spectacle in 221 theses, putting forth ideas that are deeply imbedded in current forms of cultural opposition to the human consequences of late capitalist economy and neo-liberal ideology.

The Situationists represent one of the first movements to have popular impact with their Marxist critique of contemporary society through their writings and cultural resistance. Debord proposes that spectacle is an extension of the idea of reification where "everything that was directly lived is now merely represented in the distance" (Debord [1967] 2002, 12 [Thesis 1]). The image is central to his critique. He writes that "the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images" (Debord [1967] 2002, 12 [Thesis 4]). The seventh thesis addresses the role of the sign: "The language of the spectacle consists of *signs* of the dominant system of production — signs, which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that system" (Debord [1967] 2002, 13). As people consume the commodities or image-objects of the spectacle, they become part of the spectacle, making rebellion against it difficult. The spectacle absorbs even the most radical gesture, turning it into a commodity, negating its subversive meaning. Debord argues that resistance is not a question of elaborating the spectacle of refusal, but rather of refusing the spectacle. The AMF presents itself as an heir of the ideas of Guy Debord and the Situationists. Debord's name, as well as Situationist slogans, such as 'Live without dead time,' appear often scattered throughout the magazine and other AMF materials. Lasn also comments frequently on the link between his work and that of the Situationists. For example, in an interview with The Sun, he remarks: "[o]ne of the most profound influences in my life has been a group of European artists, philosophers, and anarchists who called themselves the Situationists" (Jensen 2001). Despite his reverence, Lasn sees the work of the AMF as improving significantly the Situationist project. "Thirty years ago, the Situationists had a half baked idea about detourning consumer capitalism, putting power in the hands of the people and constructing a spontaneous new way of life. Now it's up to culture jammers to finish the job" (Lasn 1999, 214-215).

A term that Lasn uses above but that I have not yet elaborated on is the meme, the basic unit of communication in culture jamming. Lasn ascribes much power to the meme. "Potent memes can change minds, alter behavior, catalyze collective mindshifts and transform cultures... Whoever has the memes has the power" (Lasn 1999, 125). More concretely, memes are condensed signs that stimulate visual, verbal, musical, or behavioral associations that people can easily imitate and transmit to others. For example, culture jammers play on familiar commercial memes such as the Nike swoosh to engage people of different political persuasions in thinking about the implications of their fashion statements.

Richard Dawkins coined the term meme in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) in an attempt to describe the cultural equivalent of a gene. Dawkins speculates that human beings have an adaptive mechanism that other species lack. In addition to genetic inheritance, humans can pass their ideas from one generation to the next, allowing them to overcome challenges more flexibly and more quickly than through the longer process of genetic adaptation and selection.

> Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation (1976, 192).

Susan Blackmore (1999) proposes that memes are autonomous as they travel (and take root) from one individual to another, a view that also allows for the possibility of deliberately creating and spreading memes. From the point of view of memetic theory, the mass media is the most sophisticated engine for the dissemination of memes today for it exposes potential carriers to an incredible volume of memes daily.

In their theory and practice of social change, the AMF embraces the meme as primary mechanism that makes culture jamming work. Lasn writes: "We build our own meme factory, put out a better product and beat the corporations at their own game. We identify macromemes and metamemes – the core ideas without which a sustainable future is unthinkable - and deploy them" (Lasn 1999, 124). For Lasn, the best culture jam is one that introduces a meta-meme, a two-level message that punctures a specific commercial image, but does so in a way that challenges some larger aspect of the political culture of corporate domination.

Although the AMF perpetually claims to be inspired by the Situationists, the organization only engages with their insights superficially, even ignoring some of their assertions. While Guy Debord is interested in a critique of capitalism and revolutionary alternatives, the AMF participates in the spectacle it proclaims to oppose. In many ways, *Adbusters* itself represents and elaborates the spectacle. In her article "What's Next," Naomi Klein accuses Kalle Lasn, Adbusters and their devotees as pursuing a "watered-down version of revolution through 'culture jamming'" (Klein 2002). Naomi Klein also writes that "adbusters are susceptible to a spiraling bravado and to a level of self-promotion that can just plain silly ... There is a strong tendency to exaggerate the power of wheat paste and a damn good joke" (2002, 295). Commenting on the celebration and cooptation of *Adbusters'* culture jamming in advertising circles, Petra Chevrier suggests that "[h]ardcore cultural activists may do best by continuing their below-the-radar self-publishing, anarchistic and experimental projects" (Chevrier 1999, 33).

Ironically, the type of activism Chevrier endorses is what the Situationists practiced with détournement. The book *Fin de Copenhague (1957)* by Asger Jorn and Guy Debord, two of the founding members of the Situationist International, illustrates how the AMF fails to not only follow into the footsteps of this avant-guard group, but also how the AMF limits its project. This visual example of détournement represents at once a critique of the spectacle and a declaration of war against it. An unplanned spontaneous project, the idea was conceived of and two hundred signed copies of the book were produced within the time span of twenty-four hours. Debord and Jorn's new representation of representation features collages made from newspapers and magazines stolen from a magazine stand, taking pieces of the spectacle and placing them into new context. Once these collages had been photographed and transferred to print plates, Jorn dropped ink on them, a technique that represents a disregard for and attack on the tradition of printmaking. Another unusual feature of the book is that it lacks structure or narrative that guides a reading.

Fin de Copenhague's status as a detourned work derives from what Debord and Wolman emphasize in their definition of détournement. They consider two main categories of détournement: minor détournement and deceptive détournement.

> Minor détournement is the détournement of an element which has no importance in itself and which thus draws all its meaning from the *new context* in which it has been placed. For example, a press clipping, a neutral phrase, a commonplace photograph.
>
> Deceptive détournement, also termed premonitory-proposition détournement, is in contrast the détournement of an intrinsically significant element, which derives a different scope from the *new context*. A slogan of Saint-Just, for example, or a film sequence from Eisenstein. (Debord and Wolman 1956; italics added)

The significant aspect of these definitions is that in a detourned work *new context* is essential. With the book *Fin de Copenhague*, Debord and Jorn realize this recontextualization. They took magazines and newspapers and produced with parts of them a new kind of book in an unusual way. When we compare *Fin de Copenhague* with the AMF magazine, the latter's shortcoming as détournement becomes clear. While Debord and Wolman's book puts spectacle into new context and thereby undermines it, the content of *Adbusters* presented within the form of the glossy magazine does not recontextualize and therefore does not succeed at détournement in the

Situationist sense. However, this failure to follow the Situationist definition of détournement in itself does not represent a shortcoming. The question we have to pose now is: What is it about this not recontextualizing that hampers the AMF's cultural politics and its communicative strategy?

CHAPTER 2: CONSUMERISM, POSTMODERNISM, AND THE AMF

> *The consumer society fails to deliver on its promise of fulfillment through material comforts because human wants are insatiable, human needs are socially defined, and the real sources of personal happiness are elsewhere.*
>
> Durning 1992, 48

> *The avarice of mankind is insatiable.*
>
> Aristotle

Primarily, the AMF and those commenting on its project define it as an anti-consumerism or anti-consumer culture initiative. This chapter explores aspects of the phenomenon the AMF opposes, as well as the organization's relationship to it.

In the late nineteenth century, industrialized societies experienced a shift from an orientation of production to one of consumption. Mass retailing at fixed prices, national distribution of advertising, the rise of department stores, and elaborate displays were signs of new relations toward goods and shifting attitudes toward society and its future.

Since Marx's analysis of capitalism, the topic of how commodities influence human existence reflects shifts in intellectual paradigms, some of which I describe below. The 1990s brought with it a heightened preoccupation with consumer culture. To explain current public and academic interest in this topic, Schor and Holt (2000) point to new inequalities, commodification of all areas of social life, rapid globalization of the world economy and the devastation of the natural environment. Within this context, the AMF represents one of the many groups that target consumer culture in their work.

Although AMF activism takes many forms, its founder argues that they are directed at the single culprit, consumerism. To the question "Do you feel that by entering so many different areas of activism that you may be spreading yourselves too thin?" Kalle Lasn answers:

> We are always spreading ourselves too thin. But all these paradigms we are trying to shift are not

> separate campaigns that have nothing to do with each other. They all come from the same source, they all boil down to a consumer culture that has been nurtured by commercial television and commercial media, and all those various subheadings of our consumer culture aren't working anymore; they are mired in an industrial/non-ecological past. (Hyman 1995)

This statement contains the broad strokes of the AMF's theory of society and social change. It implies that the AMF takes as a starting point that consumption is the central feature of human relations today and that mass media play a significant role in the shaping of how we experience the world. Lasn's response also points to an understanding of the contemporary world as different than the "industrial/non-ecological past." He problematizes this past by presenting it as disjointed from current realities, a conception that falls in line with postmodernist perspectives.

THE STUDY OF CONSUMER SOCIETY

A brief summary of the main trends in the study of consumer culture clarifies how the AMF is situated within this debate. Furthermore, it lays bare the significance of contemporary understandings of consumer culture in shaping the AMF's project.

Some of the earliest formal studies of consumer culture examine the corporate influence on individuals and society. A number of these theories draw on Marx's analysis of capitalism. Central to these understandings is Marx's idea that in capitalism, the relationship between production and consumption is ruptured, bringing with it alienation from the act of labor, its product, other workers and humanity, as well the reification of human relations. Marxist approaches applied to the study of consumption are fundamentally economic critiques; they consider how the profit motive leads to the organization of consumption.

This tradition includes the writings of the Frankfurt School. For example, drawing on Marx's theory of alienation in the workplace, in their essay "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," (1944) Adorno and Horkheimer argue that employers' needs for objectified and submissive workers create a parallel need for dominated passive consumers. In other words, the objectification of labor requires the objectification of the consumer. I expand on these theorists' work in Chapter 4.

Two decades later, in *One Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse explores how the logic of the commodity reifies human relations. He writes: "The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to society has changed" (Marcuse [1964]1986, 9).

Among the early economic critiques of consumer culture also stands John Kenneth Galbraith's influential book *The Affluent Society* (1958). Here he takes a Keynesian approach, arguing that the corporation both creates and satisfies want. For example, he writes "the institution of advertising and salesmanship ... creates desire" (1958, 11).

Moving away from a largely economic perspective, the next generation of the study of consumer culture takes a cultural turn. The cultural critiques of the phenomenon seek to explain why consumers partake in consumer culture. They examine the meaning embedded in products. Not the material aspects of the products but rather its non-material, symbolic characteristics point to where meaning emanates. The central theme of this approach is the manufacturing of meaning. Meaning and identity are the conceptual building blocks.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) understands social relations not only as economic but also as cultural. He argues that in capitalist societies cultural capital is distributed such that different social groups have varying capacities to ascribe meaning and value to material and nonmaterial signs, thereby pointing to the active nature of consumption practices and their role in the articulation of identity. Jean Baudrillard (1988) takes this argument a step further by arguing that we become what we buy, rather than its reversal, we consume according to who we are. In other words, for Baudrillard, signs and signifying practices are what is consumed.

Theorist such as Roland Barthes, John Berger, and Judith Williamson take up one of the most prominent features of consumer society, the ubiquity of advertisements and their saturation of public space. In 1996, 3,600 advertisement messages bombarded the average American consumer compared to 1,500 in 1984 (Rumbo 2002, 128). Traditionally, the role of the advertisement was to inform the consumer of their existence and uses, and therefore compel the consumer to purchase it for its various qualities. With the rise of the importance of the brand name and the explosion of wealth in the core and semi-periphery, however, the question of whether an advertisement achieves an increase of sales of a particular product is irrelevant, for this function is secondary in comparison to its role in selling consumer culture itself. Advertisements normalize and expand the logic of consumerism by framing ceaselessly products as remedies for life's problems.

Judith Williamson understands consumer culture as camouflaging the class system. She writes:

> In our society, while the real distinctions between people are created by their role in the *process* of production, as workers, it is the *products* of their own work that are used, in the false categories invoked by advertising, to obscure the real structure of society by replacing class with the distinctions made by the consumption of particular goods. Thus instead of being identified by what they produce, people are made to identify themselves with what they consume. ... We are made to feel that we can rise or fall in society through what we are able to buy, and this obscures the actual class basis which still underlies social position. The fundamental differences in our society are still class differences, but use of manufactured goods as means of *creating* classes or groups forms an overlay on them. (Williamson 1978,13)

Williamson puts forth a simple, yet insightful explanation for how and why advertising functions as well as it does. As a system, advertising "feeds off a genuine 'use-value. Besides needing social meaning we obviously *do need* material goods. Advertising gives those goods a social meaning so that two meanings are crossed, and neither is adequately fulfilled" (1978, 14). Berger articulates this outlook in a similar fashion. "The pursuit of individual happiness has been acknowledged as a universal right. Yet, the existing social conditions make the individual feel powerless. He lives in the contradiction between what he is and what he would like to be" (Berger [1972] 1977, 148).

Roland Barthes sought to expose the arbitrary nature of cultural phenomena such as ads by using linguistic methods based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure to uncover the political speech underlying contemporary myth. Barthes was interested in "showing how all the apparently spontaneous forms and rituals of contemporary bourgeois society are subject to a systematic distortion, liable at any moment to be dehistoricized, 'naturalized,' converted into myth" (Hebdige 1988, 9). From this perspective, everyday life is insidious and more systematically organized than previously held. For example, in *Mythologies*, Barthes sets out "to examine the normally hidden set of rules, codes and conventions through which meanings particular to specific social groups (i.e. those in power) are rendered universal and 'given for the whole society" (ibid.).

The tradition of research initiated by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (known also as the Birmingham School or British Cultural Studies) represents yet another shift in the study of consumer culture, one that brings with it a focus on consumers' lived experiences. The historical and ethnographic case studies generated by this school examine how the structures of consumer culture play out in everyday life and how they produce of meaning. Among the most influential studies that emerged out of the Birmingham School stand the works of Dick Hebdige, Stuart Hall, and Paul Willis. These scholars make their object of study the reproduction of class boundaries in everyday cultural practices found in British youth subcultures.

The 1980s and 90s brought with it challenges to the critical study of consumption that put into question all previous examination. Commodities are no longer manipulating the consumer but rather, the consumer uses them to pursue her/his own socio-cultural interests. This approach gives rise to the view that progressive political possibilities germinate in popular consumption.

Studies of popular culture, such as Fiske's *Television Culture*, emphasize the relative openness and polysemic character of text by stating that "the dominant ideology, working through the form of text, can be resisted, evaded, or negotiated with, in varying degrees by differently socially situated readers" (Fiske 1987, 41). Fisk draws on de Certeau's (1984) work. De Certeau is concerned with the production of meaning by consumers and the consumption of signs as subversive act, celebrating the creativity of consumer practices. He sees consumers as almost endlessly creative in the appropriation and manipulation of consumer goods. From this perspective of de Certeau and Fisk, consumption is an act of liberation and resistance takes place within dominant ideology. The burden of resistance falls on the reader rather than calling to action the producer.

Fiske's view stands in opposition to Colin MacCabe (1981) and E. Ann Kaplan (1983), who call for a radical text and emphasize the process of creating the text. MacCabe and Kaplan's ideas imply that the impulse for social change derives from a text that motivates the reader to pursue transformative action. Fiske argues that this approach "overestimate[s] the power of the text, [misplaces] the origins of radicalism and of social change, and [underestimates] the role of the reader in the construction of meaning" (Fiske 1987, 46). He goes on to argue that the relationship between popularity and progressive change remains unaddressed. Fiske writes:

> The radical text, in its rejection of the dominant conventions for representing reality, tries to exclude the dominant ideology from any role in the production of meanings from the text. But in a mass-industrialized society, where our cultural life is dominated by the products of industrialized cultural production and distribution, the conventions of that culture industry, with their necessarily close relationship to the dominant ideology, have become agents of popularity, accessibility, and understandability, and thus have to be taken into account in a theory of popular meanings within a mass culture. (Fiske 1987, 46-47)

In other words, Fiske argues that contained within dominant ideology exist contradiction and therefore potential for resistance. However, emphasizing the polysemic character of signs implies a focus on the reader as individual, neglecting concerted efforts of groups to pursue progressive social change.

Furthermore, it discourages extra-systemic initiatives or agency that pursues change outside of existing structures. This view also takes for granted the mechanisms of private property as well as the commodity and fails to question the environmental and social sustainability of the system of consumerism.

RECENT CRITIQUES OF CONSUMER CULTURE

In this book *The myth of consumerism* (2002), Conrad Lodziak criticizes what he perceives as the dominant theory of consumption within Cultural Studies and the sociology of culture for providing a far too positive assessment of consumerism. He asserts that "the dominant academic theory of consumption has come to coincide with the promotion of consumerism" (2002, 7). Lodziak attacks cultural studies for focusing on the image of consumer culture rather than examining consumer culture as an economic phenomenon. In particular, he points to these approaches' taking on of aspects of postmodernist theory as undermining fundamentally a meaningful study of contemporary late-capitalist society. Ideas such as epistemological and cultural relativism, the de-materializations of consumption (i.e. defining it as a symbolic activity) and the blurring of boundaries, have lead to a turning away from the critical stance these disciplines took in its origins.

More specifically, Lodziak criticizes cultural studies and sociology of culture for focusing on the images of consumer culture rather than also examining its economic nature. He writes: "Culturalist theory has it that what we actually consume are images, meanings, symbolic values, dreams, fantasies and the like" (2002, vii). Consequently, the non-material nature of these aspects of consumption that are gratis requires little attention to culture as an economic phenomenon.

Lodziak identifies a consensus in the discourses he criticizes, one that is marked by ascribing to consumption particular and narrowly defined characteristics. It portrays consumption as an

> arena of choice and individual freedom, it focuses on the meaningful nature of consumption – its symbolic value rather than its material use value, and it emphasizes the significance of

> consumption for the formulation, maintenance and expression of self-identity and lifestyle. (Lodziak 2002,1)

The dominant contemporary approach to the study of culture consumption propagates a number of myths such as "the myth of widespread affluence, the myth that everybody is gripped by the motive to consume more and more, and the myth that everybody finds the attractions of consumerism irresistible" (2002, ix).

Lodziak condemns this approach, which he asserts "is best seen not as a theory dispassionately forged in the interest of truth, but as an *ideology* that can be used to legitimate directions pursued by big business" (ibid.). In particular, it fails to problematize dominant trends within consumer culture. These tendencies include

> the increasing commercialization and commodification of everyday life, the growing volume of commodities in circulation, and the fact that almost everybody, at least in the advanced capitalist societies, addresses their needs and wants by purchasing goods, services and experiences rather than providing these for themselves. (2002,1)

Lodziak suggests that the source of consumer motivations lies largely in the satisfying of basic needs, even in the so-called affluent societies (2002, 3). He points to relations of production in late capitalism and the relevance of basic needs for an explanation of consumption.

> Effects of employment, for a majority, are such that the range of action and scope for autonomous action are severely restricted. Consumption (including unnecessary consumption) is one type of activity that is served by, fits in with, and reinforces these restrictions. (2002, 4)

Lodziak traces the transformation of the field of the study of consumerism from a critical perspective to one that celebrates and promotes it. He argues that current approaches to the study of consumption juxtapose themselves to "mass culture critiques" and "the production of consumption" perspectives, describing them as no longer adequate (2002, 11). This account involves the presentation of Frankfurt School writings as describing homogeneously the consumer as passive and manipulated by producers and advertisers. Cultural Studies and the sociology of culture see themselves as inverting this conception of actors by ascribing to individual consumer participatory, active, and creative roles, thereby representing them as free agents.

If British Cultural studies or an "appropriation is resistance" framework fails to be adequate in the formulation of a critical cultural studies, the question we then have to pose is: How can we transform cultural studies in order to enable us to take a more critical approach? In Chapter 4, I turn to early critical theory to attempt to explore this question.

While Lodziak points to paradigmatic limitations within much of the contemporary study of consumption, a brief examination of a recurring theme within scholarly debates about consumer society, namely co-optation, raises yet another issue that helps to position the AMF's project.

CO-OPTATION OF SUBVERSIVE REACTIONS TO CONSUMERISM

Barthes describes the process of cultural co-optation and its effect as follows: "One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalized subversion" (Barthes 1973, 150). Fiske extends Barthes' metaphor of inoculation to describe and explain the mechanism of incorporation. "Bourgeois realism can contain radical and subversive discourses, but it places them low down in the hierarchy of discourses and thus enables them to 'inoculate' the dominant ideology against the radicalism which it is apparently allowing to speak" (Fiske 1987, 39).

More recently, in his study of zines, Stephen Buncombe found that radical underground culture did not threaten or even affect mainstream society. On the contrary, "'alternative' culture was being celebrated in the mainstream media and used to create new styles and profits for the commercial culture industry" (Duncombe 1997, 5). Although identifying an important process, Duncombe's understanding of cooptation as well as that of Barthes and Fiske fails to examine the phenomenon in terms of its reciprocal relationship between the producers and consumers of products and culture, one that Thomas Frank explores.

In *The conquest of cool: Business culture, counterculture, and the rise of hip consumerism* (1997), Thomas Frank looks at the cooptation of counterculture by analyzing the forces and logic that make rebel youth cultures highly attractive to corporate decision makers. He argues that in North America, counterculture has played an important role in commerce at least since the 1960s. Frank explores the difficulty of distinguishing between authentic and fake counterculture - the cultural dissent and its cooptation by commercial interests. In this process, he dismantles the assumptions of cooptation theory, a theory that he defines as "faith in the revolutionary potential of 'authentic' counterculture combined with the notion that business mimics and mass-produces counterculture in order to cash in on a particular demographic and to subvert the great threat that 'real' counterculture represents" (Frank 1997, 7). He argues that this approach does not take into account the complex relationship between counterculture and dominant culture. Rather, Frank asserts, cooptation is a process that is more complex than the struggle between capital and revolutionary youth culture.

Frank understands the 60s not only as the period when the 'hip' or 'cool' emerged as relevant for capital but also as the "commercial template for our times" and "a historical prototype for the construction of cultural machines that transform alienation and despair into consent" (1997, 235). Frank summarizes the core tenets of hip consumerism as follows:

> Regardless of whatever else the newest 'generation' is believed to portend, it is always roughly synonymous with that human faculty know as 'skepticism'; it is always described as hostile to mass culture, as foreign, alien group not as easily convinced as others have been, as a standing challenge to marketers who believe … in repetition and continuity (ibid.).

Frank credits Bill Bern Bach of the Doyle Dane Bern Bach advertising agency (DDB), prominent in the late 50s and the 60s, with inventing anti-advertising and with being the first adperson to "embrace the mass society critique, to appeal directly to the powerful but unmentionable public fears of conformity, of manipulation, of fraud, and of powerlessness, and to sell products by doing so" (Frank 1997, 55). Bernbach's ad-campaigns transformed the VW Beetle from what was known in the 50s as a Nazi product and bore the stigma of the mass society into a hip vehicle. The success of anti-advertising lay partially distancing the product from consumerism (1997, 68).

DDB was part of advertising's Creative Revolution that transformed itself into taking into account and offering to solve the problems that consumerism creates. The Creative Revolution signaled a shift in capitalism in that "the advertising industry began to recognize nonconformity, even more than science or organization or standardization or repetition or regulation, as a dynamic element of advertising and, ultimately, of the 'permanent revolution' of capitalism itself" (1997, 89).

From this brief discussion about co-optation, it follows that conceiving of the AMF as existing in a dichotomous relationship with corporations that co-opt its subversive elements leaves unexamined their reciprocal relationship. Rather than understanding the AMF merely as a subversive project that advertisers borrow from[5], its study has to include consideration of the reality that its creators emerge from mainstream culture industries, that every producer in these industries is not a dupe of the corporate ideology, and that all of them are informed by contemporary intellectual and cultural trends.

Despite the observations I have just made, particular features of consumer society make the launching of a subversive project difficult. Next, I explore how these characteristics contribute to undermine the work of the AMF.

FACTORS UNDERMINING THE AMF'S PROJECT

The case of the AMF illustrates the inherent obstacles in launching challenges to consumerism. These relate to political and ideological positioning, the increasing difficulty involved in escaping the commodity form, the tendency of the co-optation of subversive initiatives, and the overwhelming corporate control over discursive spaces such as media and public space.

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[5] Petra Chevrier, editor of *Fuse* magazine writes: "[M]any advertising agencies avidly subscribe to Adbusters, presumably to keep abreast of the latest in guerilla media innovation that they can in turn reappropriate to build better ads" (1999).

In a letter to *Adbusters* Ed Herman, co-author of *Manufacturing Consent,* criticizes the AMF's project as "intellectually and programmatically pitiful," asserting that Lasn's critique of academics obscures their efforts in combating the "forces of corporate capital" (Letters 1999, 12). Lasn replies: "What have you done lately besides talk and write, Mr. Herman?," a response that reflects his rejection of Marxist social critiques (ibid.).

Herman is not alone in pointing out the limitation of the AMF's attempt to declare itself as able to surpass the issues of the political left and right. The Canadian group L'Ombre Noire criticizes the absence of a clear ideological and political agenda with a satirical response to the AMF's annually promoted "Buy Nothing Day" by proposing "Steal Something Day."

> The geniuses at *Adbusters* have managed to create the perfect feel-good, liberal, middle-class activist non-happening ... A day which, by definition, is insulting to the millions of people worldwide who are too poor or marginalized to be considered "consumers" ... The A*dbuster's* intelligentsia tell us that they're neither 'left nor right,' and have proclaimed a non-ideological crusade against overconsumption. Steal Something Day, on the other hand, identifies with the historic and contemporary resistance against the causes of capitalist exploitation, not its symptoms. (Steal Something Day 2000)

Rumbo also understands the organization's failure to take an explicitly political stance as one factor undermining the AMF's project. He asserts that it leaves the organization "vulnerable to criticisms from more ideologically motivated observers" (Rumbo 2002, 142). Furthermore, he points out that the AMF slogan "Cultural Revolution is our business" indicates that the organization's "brain trust borrows heavily from the corporate marketing model in creating its own socially and environmentally beneficial marketing campaign" (ibid.).

Naomi Klein reflections on the AMF point to the difficulty involved in stepping outside of the logic of the commodity. She argues that the AMF pursues its form of culture jamming to such a high degree that it takes the form of any other business selling things and ideas. She writes that critics see the magazine's line of anti-consumer products that they say has made the magazine "less a culture-jamming clearinghouse than a home-shopping network for adbusting accessories" (Klein 2000, 295). Klein quotes Carrie McLaren, culture jammer and editor of the New York zine *Stay Free*!: "What comes out is no real alternative to our culture of consumption ... just a different brand" (ibid.). Ironically, Klein's work has gained such popularity that her anti-consumer and anti-corporate views are sought after highly by corporations, and companies have introduced products such as "No Logo" olive oil and cell phones. [6] Schor and Holt also comment on this predicament:

> Difference, dissent, resistance, opposition - they all resurface as consumables, whether through the purchase of a black Barbie, a Working Assets telephone card, or a Patagonia organic t-shirt. A recent popular anticonsumption manifesto by Naomi Klein has its own "No Logo" logo; opposition ads are another form of ads. Is it possible to escape a world of such ubiquitous commodification? (Schor and Holt 2000, xxi)

The absorption of opposition to oppressive dominant culture continually plagues cultural resistance projects. Marketing to the postmodern consumer takes the form of niche marketing as can be the case in the advertising of ethical mutual funds and organic products. Rumbo concludes: "In sum, although resistance by environmentally and politically motivated consumers can effect change, marketers also strengthen the consumerist hegemony by absorbing criticisms and converting such resistance into reasons for consumption" (Rumbo 2002,144).

The overwhelming control of public space by corporations through advertising, directly or indirectly, also limits the AMF's project. Herman and

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[6] In an interview with Indexed Magazine Klein states: "I've been asked to consult by all the major branding companies – Wolff Olins, Brand Futures – and also by individual corporations like Shell Oil and Unilever" (Bullock 2002).

Chomsky, among many other theorists, implicate the media in the "manufacturing of consent" its active and purposeful role in (re)producing neoliberal hegemony. They write:

> [A]mong their other functions, the media serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them. The representatives of these interests have important agendas and principles that they want to advance, and they are well positioned to shape and constrain media policy (Herman and Chomsky, [2002] 1988, xi).

Herman and Chomsky also comment: "... the same underlying power sources that own the media and fund them as advertisers, that serve as primary definers of the news, and that produce flak and proper-thinking experts, also play a key role in fixing basic principles and the dominant ideologies" (Herman and Chomsky [1988] 2002, xi). Since advertising revenue provides the vast majority of television, radio, and print media with the financial resources to do business, any publication or program that is critical of advertising or consumerism places itself at a competitive disadvantage (Herman and Chomsky [1988] 2002, 14-18). This mechanism leads to a situation where advertising messages legitimate consumerism by controlling a mass-media industry that is not only devoid of dissenting views but also lacks space for the its potential articulation.

While the AMF opposes and seeks alternatives to consumer culture, it does so with the tools that are integral and vital in the functioning of this system, a position that hampers its ability to step outside of its logic. The organization clearly has nothing against advertising and consequently the system it supports. In a December 2000 interview Lasn comments: "I'm not trying to zap markets. I'm not trying to zap advertising" (Setaro 2000). In another interview he comments:

> We have nothing against advertising. Our policy is that we will accept product ads that we believe in – a book, a CD – anything that we feel good about. We will accept any kind of ad – even if we don't agree with it. ... We think that advertising in the 90s will move away from product ads to

> idea ads. I think that in the 90s people will be selling more ideas and fewer products. We want to be part of that movement, so we encourage an accept idea ads and a few product ads that we feel good about. (Hyman 1995)

The AMF foundation is consequently limited twofold in respect of its relationship to mainstream media. It uses its structures to construct its messages and is thus restricts itself to function within logic. At the same time, it lacks the access other producers of culture and advertisers have to public space.

CHAPTER 3: AMF MEDIA

In this chapter, I explore tension that arises from the interaction between the media the AMF uses and the messages they convey, between form and content. The organization constructs anti-consumerist narratives predominantly my means of two media: the glossy magazine and images that function like advertisements. Both the glossy magazine and the advertisement play a significant role as consumerist platforms in consumer society. Consequently, the following questions guide the thoughts in this chapter: What stands in the way of subverting these media? How does the AMF's communicative strategy limit its cultural politics?

MEDIA

The AMF communicates via dominant mass media channels. As I have already mentioned, they include billboards, the magazine *Adbusters*, the organization's website, and Kale Lasn's book *Culture jam*. Within these media, the particular form that carries the lion's share of AMF's message (in theory[7] or practice) is the subvertisement, an advertisement-like image with an anti-dominant culture message. For the organization, this focus on visuals is highly significant; it separates them from other movements. Lasn formulates the importance of the image in the work of the AMF as follows:

> The old activist movements, especially on the left, relied heavily on text – dense manifestos and critiques, with a drawing or a cartoon thrown in every now and then. Right from the start, we decided that culture jamming would be driven not by text but by images, sounds, and video, which slip easily into the collective psyche. (Jensen 2001)

These words point to the underlying philosophical assumptions the AMF makes about the propagation of culture and ideas as well as the central role culture jamming and memes play in the conceptualization of the organization's project of social change.

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[7] Kalle Lasn's book *Culture Jam* contains few images. However, he does address in detail the role of images.

One of the most important new mass media of our time, the Internet, plays a pivotal role in the dissemination of the organization's images and ideas, allowing it to launch cyberpetitions, virtual protests, and a global spreading of information. Lasn describes it as "one of the most potent meme-replicating mediums ever invented" (1999, 132). When asked in an interview "How much would you say the Internet has helped bring your network of jammers together?" Lasn responds:

> It's been the key fact. We communicated as best we could for many years without the Internet. We had 300 organizers around the world for Buy Nothing Day. We had to send them expensive packages through the mail. It was quite a cumbersome and expensive system that actually stopped us from growing as fast as we could grow. And as soon as we started making our posters available through the Internet – just print from the website, look at QuickTime versions of our website, and order them if you want to - as soon as we went on the Internet, things really took off for us on many of our campaigns. And the 300 or 400 people we used to deal with ... as I said, it's grown to 35,000, and we are now a different kind of organization. And we are global. Before that, most of the action was in the Pacific Northwest, and, now, some of the most BND jams have happened in Australia, Israel or Estonia. (Rosenberg 2001)

Not the Internet, however, but the television is the AMF's medium of choice. In an interview Lasn explains this view:

> The internet is an up and coming thing and we use it very successfully to launch global campaign. It is a way of networking and creating solidarity, as we talked about this earlier, but quite frankly, television is still 80% of the power. People don't sit on their computer and surf for four hours every night; they sit in front of their TVs. Television is still the primary battleground. You can have the most brilliant web site in the world and you may still not get anywhere with it. But if you're able to detonate one mind bomb on Larry King Live or CBS News with Dan Rather than that can really shake things up. (Pickerel et al. 2001)

In the November/December 2001 issue of *Adbusters* Kono Matsu writes "Television is the command center of consumer capitalism and the most powerful communications medium of our time" (2001, 87). In his book, Lasn makes nearly the same statement, describing the TV as "the most powerful *social* communications medium of our time" (1999, 133; italics added). He goes on to argue that "a fifteen-, thirty- or sixty-second TV spot created by a team of passionate filmmakers is ... the most powerful of all the weapons in the culture jammer's arsenal" (ibid.).

The television is also the primary site of the AMF's clash with media corporations. The organization believes that major broadcasters are rejecting their anti-commercial message due to existing power structures and the corporate ideology of the television industry. Consequently, the AMF is involved in a continuous struggle to attempt to persuade and force[8] networks to air its the social marketing messages or "mindbombs."

The medium that requires many of the organization's resources in terms of distribution networks, publication talent and cost, is the glossy *Adbusters: Journal of the Mental Environment*. *Adbusters* is composed of images, short articles, and readers' comments and opinion pieces. It builds on the immense popularity of picture magazines such as *Life* and *National Geographic*, promising revolution in an enticing package that is entertaining, playful, and provocative. From a visual and content perspective, *Adbusters* is most comparable to *Colours*, a magazine published by the Italian based clothing manufacturer Benetton. Although the former is published by a non-profit organization, and the later is the product of a corporation, their messages and look are of the same spirit. Both titles are involved in a fight for attention from an image saturated youth market, using shocking photographs in combination with crisp and clever design to do so.

From its premier issue on, AMF has continued to go through a metamorphosis. With each new issue, a new puzzle piece of the identity of *Adbusters* supplied to the reader and a new part of the organization's story is told. At the same time, it reinvents itself and each issue has a life of their own.

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[8] The AMF has been planning to launch legal action to open the airwaves to non-corporate interests. As of yet, this has not occurred.

The design of the magazine has changed tremendously over the course of *Adbusters'* publication, becoming increasingly unconventional. While a collage of images, phrases, opinion pieces and readers' letters define the form of its content, more uncommon features include the absence of a table of contents, page numbers (since issue #35), and article titles. Other unusual design elements consist of holes punched through issues[9], windows cut into pages[10], frequent changes in the font of the magazine title, two front covers instead of one front and one back[11] and representations of coffee stains and "post-it" notes.

Each magazine issue carries a different title that corresponds to a theme it explores. This feature enables the publication to be highly flexible and to address current socio-political issues in much detail. Like a current, the theme runs through the magazine. Narratives about food, empire, denial, and design unfold in a collage of written text and images. For example, the *Empire* issue (no. 40, March/April 2002), the notion of empire in terms of surveillance, army presence, threat of war, international travel, and control through consumerism. Although this approach potentially permits a manifold exploration of elements of topics, it also excludes, for the pages are finite.

Besides linking directly their project to the ideas of particular thinkers, the AMF also places itself into the history of the subversive use of graphic design. For instance, the *Design Anarchy* issue (no. 37, September/October 2001) includes a "Design Interventions" section. While it features the often mentioned sandpaper cover of Guy Debord's book *Memoirs*, it also carries two other choices: a Pfäfferli & Huber ad and *Simplicissimus* magazine. The description of the Pfäfferli & Huber ad reads:

> It's one of the greatest design interventions on record. In 1958, the Swiss pharmaceutical

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[9] Issue number 38 "What's my damage: The birth of mental environmentalism" and issue number 51 "Systematically distorted information"

[10] Issue number 44 "Are you in denial"

[11] Issue number 39 "The epiphany issue," issue number 41 "Mad world/Mad pride," number 45 "I want to change my look," issue number 48 "Us vs. them," issue number 50 "Winner/Losers"

> company Pfäfferli + Huber AG hired graphic designer Ernst Bettler to create a series of posters celebrating the company's 50th anniversary. Bettler's cutting-edge work, they hoped, would put a post-war shine on the company. Bettler turned in a fine, four-poster series that soon hit the streets of Switzerland – where an incensed populace tore them down and exploded with rage against the arrogant, brutish corporation. Within six weeks, P+H was ruined forever. P + H, you see, had a history of involvement in testing carried out on prisoners in Germany's wartime concentration camps. Bettler hadn't forgotten. Taken one by one, the designer's four posters seem innocent enough. Posted in a row, however, they appear to be a series of letters (the "A is shown here). You can guess what four-letter world Bettler made sure to spell out for the world (2001, 85).

It turns out, that this story was based on a hoax, published in *dot dot dot* magazine's winter 2001 issue, a credit *Adbusters* fails to give. Researching the historical accuracy of this story would have left the writer of the article without results for the Pfäfferli + Huber AG, Ernst Bettler, or the pharmaceutical compound the poster advertises, Contrazipan. Another clue pointing to the fabricated nature of this piece is that in the issue of *dot dot dot* that first carried the story, the editors comment that they would be "resorting to fiction to make certain points" (Poynor 2003).

The opposite page of the "Cantrazipan" ad features *Simplicissimus,* a satirical journal published between 1896-1944 in Germany that relied heavily on cartoons to communicate its subversive messages. Before WWI, it carried the work of such revolutionary artists and writes as Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), and Thomas Theodor Heine (1867-1948). Its graphic and editorial content included protest against the Kaiser, the military, and the clergy. Although *Adbusters* does briefly describe this aspect of the journal, it is not telling the whole story. With the beginning of the war, *Simplicissimus* abandoned its oppositional position and began publishing nationalist and chauvinist content (The German Historical Museum 2003).

The examples *Adbusters* uses to illustrate the impact and significance of "Design Interventions" appear particularly unsuitable when considering that there are many subversive magazines or other subversive graphic work that have had impact on socio-cultural development. These include the art of graffiti artist Keith Haring that has had great significance for AIDS activism, the work of the New York graphic group *The Guerrilla Girls*, or one of the countless left-wing and feminist magazines[12].

THE MAGAZINE AS MEDIUM

The magazine is a medium that rose out of the industrial revolution, for the social conditions and technical processes required for the production of modern mass-circulation magazines existed only from the last decade of the nineteenth century on. The magazine grew directly out of the invention of photographic reproduction and the all-iron lever press, the mechanization of paper production, as well as the automation of printing. These developments increased the efficiency and speed of publishing, making possible the mass production of the magazine.

In *Magazine Design* (1991), William Owen describes the magazine as a medium that is "ephemeral, a luxury (whereas the newspaper is a staple), in which technical rigor may coexist with artistic abstraction, and which has no definite form" (1991, 126). Consequently, Owen limits himself to a definition of its general physical properties. He writes: "a magazine is floppier than a book and stiffer than a newspaper; it has greater periodicy than a book (which has none) and less than a newspaper and it has a hybrid structure of serial and parallel reading patterns" (ibid.).

Although magazines vary tremendously in form and content, *Adbusters* is part of a long history of subversive publications. For example, it shares many characteristics with zines, which include an anti-consumerist stance and the idea that ordinary individuals can produce their own culture. To explore the differences between *Adbusters* and zines and to point to their limitations and potential in an effort to understand better the AMF's project, I draw on Stephen Duncombe's discussion of zines in his book *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (1997).

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[12] See examples of feminist graphic art see McQuiston (1997) *Suffragettes to she-devils: Women's liberation and beyond.* Also see Jacob and Heller (1992) *Angry graphics: Protest of the Reagan/Bush era.*

According to Duncombe, zines represent a distinct medium that was born in the 1930s. Fans of science fiction began producing fanzines as a way of communicating with one another as well as sharing science fiction stories and critical commentary. With the rise of punk rock, a musical genre ignored by mainstream media, its fans began a new type of fanzine with different political and cultural agendas, and the prefix "fan" was dropped.

Duncombe defines zines as "non-commercial, nonprofessional, small circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute themselves" (Duncombe 1997, 6). They are "scruffy," "homemade pamphlets" filled with "rantings of high weirdness and exploding with chaotic design" (1997, 1). Fundamentally, zinesters consider what they do as an alternative to and strike against commercial culture and consumer capitalism (1997, 3). The ethic of DIY (do-it-yourself) corresponds to this outlook.

Duncombe attempts to articulate zines' subversive character and their place in revolutionary struggle. For instance, he understands the goal of zine culture as offering opposition to the dominant system that presents itself as being the result of natural orders. Consequently, it strives to establish "a way of understanding and acting in the world that operates with different rules and upon different values than those of consumer capitalism" (1997, 6). More specifically, Duncombe sees zine and underground culture's project in relationship to dominant culture as marking out a free space: a space within which to imagine and experiment with new, idealistic and noninstrumental ways of thinking, communicating, and being (1997, 196).

In order to create this alternative space, one of the central aims for the creators of zines is originality. Duncombe asserts that zinesters "attempt to create something – anything – that has not already been manufactured by the commercial culture industry, and, moreover, will be difficult for it to coopt" (1997, 114). The drive to produce original thought and artwork rises out of what lies at the heart of zine culture: DIY (1997, 117). Doing it yourself is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and something far more important: the active creating of an alternative culture.

Its subversive character shapes the zine's production. Zinesters put their product together by hand, using common materials and technology. Often they have an unruly cut-and-paste layout, barely legible type, and uneven reproduction, although high accessibility to computers and publishing software has made possible a more polished look. Duncombe describes the relationship between the philosophy, look, and content of zines as follows:

> Zines, whether as a result of conscious design – using jagged cut-and-paste layout, ranting sledgehammer editorials, bizarre subject matter – or merely as the sloppy and scruffy side effect of being amateur and hand-made, don't allow the reader to be sucked in. Instead of allowing readers to relax and slip into the medium, zines push them away. Zines are dissonant; their juxtaposition in design and strong feelings in content are unsettling. Instead of offering a conflict-free escape from a tumultuous world, they hold up a mirror to it. As opposed to the happy fantasy world of mass culture, the purpose of many zines is to piss readers of, have them work to make sense of the bizarre world of the writer. (1997, 128)

The character of the zine, one that includes originality, a small-scale amateur quality, and a DIY stance culminate in its subversive spirit. Its goals, form, and content fit together to construct a coherent whole. *Adbusters* lacks this consistency, partly because of its success and the type of visual tools it uses. More concretely, its relatively high circulation represents a weakness, for with it, the idea of DIY in the form of individuals creating their own culture is relegated to the sidelines.

Although in parts it looks scruffy and as though someone put it together on a kitchen table, other aspects of *Adbusters* are indistinguishable from an expensively produced glossy magazine. These features include the high-gloss paper of the cover and the content pages, and images that at first glance are indistinguishable from ads that appear in mainstream magazines. Even in the case when text is handwritten with black markers, coffee stains are reproduced, and images appear to be affixed to the page with tape, the package in its entirety points to this design as being a matter of style rather than a reflection of amateur production. Consequently, *Adbusters* cannot escape the air of luxury, a characteristic that I have already mentioned defines magazines in general.

At the same time, this publication, unlike a zine, is difficult to emulate due to the countless resources required for the publication of this type of magazine, such as cultural literacy, design expertise, and technology. At the same time, the AMF does not actively attempt to inspire and instruct its readers to step into its footsteps by providing guidelines for self-publication. The amateur style of zines precludes such guidelines.

A related problem of the difficulty of emulation is the inability of the publication to overcome sufficiently the consumer/producer divide. Generally, the magazine is a uni-directional medium; aside from letters, readers do not participate in the production of *Adbusters.* Although "[z]ines for the most part are the expression and product of an individual" (Duncombe 1997, 12), they overcome the lack of exchange between the publication and its consumers, since anyone can make her/his own zine. In this case, all readers can simultaneously be writers. In contrast, *Adbusters* does not make possible this reversibility to the same degree, a significant reason for which is its polished, mass produced nature.

What undermines the AMF project further is that contrary to zines, *Adbusters*, once established as a publication of high caliber with thousands of subscribers, an infrastructure that supports its distribution, and dependence on income for other campaigns, has to concern itself with maintaining the market-share it has carved out for itself. In other words, *Adbusters* has to follow a regular business model, one that includes the pursuit of profit in order to finance its other expensive endeavors, such as placing subvertisements into the New York Times and producing and advertising its brand and products. From the perspective of zine culture, these activities steer *Adbusters* too far away from the principles of zine culture to be subversive, since "the very idea of profiting from a zine is anathema to the underground, bringing with it charges of "selling out" (Duncombe 1997, 13).

While zines and *Adbusters* share aspects, in form, philosophy as well as in content, the later is at the same time often difficult to distinguish from mainstream magazines that finance themselves through advertising. This likeness places *Adbusters* in the historical trajectory of these publications, one that is bound up closely with the logic of consumerism and advertising. It is this connection, I suggest, that results in the ambivalence of AMF's project.

ADVERTISING AND MEDIA CONTENT

Although it is difficult to assess to what extent advertising affects directly and indirectly non-commercial content of a medium, historical analysis of newspaper content at the time advertising gained importance provides insights into the extent advertising influences and shapes the medium that carries it.

As elements of capitalist economies, the rise of mass media and the rise of advertising are connected inextricably. James Curran's analysis of the radical British press in "Capitalism and the control of the press 1800-1975" (1977) offers a historical perspective of how advertising not only contributed to the demise of a powerful working class press but more generally, shapes the content of the media in which it appears. In the context of the study of the AMF, his findings illustrate the importance of mass media's independence from commercial interests in the formulation and dissemination of radical thought. Furthermore, Curran's assertions point to a significant reason for why the merging of anti-consumerist ideas, the glossy magazine, and the advertisement-like image give rise to tension and contradiction.

In Britain, the 1800s saw a movement away from a state-supported press towards an advertiser-supported press, a shift that was the result of the repeal of press and advertisement taxes. This development allowed for the production cost of newspapers to be higher than the sales revenues, since the advertisement revenues made up the difference and even ensured profit. In addition, the increase in revenues from the ads lead to drop in the cost to the consumer at the newspaper stand, which enabled dramatic circulation increases. Although many historians hail this transition as the emergence of a press free of the legal and fiscal controls imposed by the government, Curran argues that only the upper and middle classes benefited from the apparent independence, while the working class lost a vital medium of communication. He writes:

> The period around the middle of the nineteenth century ... did not inaugurate a new era of press freedom and liberty: it introduced a new system of press censorship more effective than anything that had gone before. Market forces succeeded where legal repression had failed in establishing the press as an instrument of social control, with lasting consequences for the development of modern British society. (Curran 1977, 198)

In other words, the changing economics of the newspaper business undermined the British working-class press, whereby the less politically inclined middle-class papers turned to advertisers instead of readers as a central source of revenue. This development lead to the increasing importance of the patronage of advertisers rather than circulation figures as a determining factor for the success of a publication. Although radical papers had large readerships, they received little or no support from advertisers, since the working-class press presented a political critique of industrial capitalism, while potential advertisers were generally beneficiaries of that same system. Consequently, more mainstream newspapers and magazines were able to make profits with the help of advertisement revenues, even with substantially lower circulations. Curran describes the impact of this development on the radical press:

> The strategic control acquired by advertisers over the press profoundly shaped and influenced its development. In the first place, it exerted a powerful pressure on the radical press to move up market as an essential strategy for survival. It forced radical newspapers to redefine their target audience, and this in turn forced them to moderate their radicalism in order to attract readers that advertisers wanted to reach. (Curran 1977, 219)

Robin Anderson's (2000) observations of advertising in the US echo those of Curran. Increasingly, magazines are dominated by selling messages in the form of advertisements and product placements by way of advertorials and advertising supplements formatted to look like feature journalism. Consequently, the relationship between the advertiser and magazine content cannot be understood as unbiased. Rather, Anderson argues, the "merging of media content and product promotion has resulted in increasing demand by manufacturers and their agents that content conform to the themes, attitudes, and messages of the advertising" (Anderson 2000, 8). An example of this reality is the following case. Since 1996, the Chrysler Company requires magazines that carry ads for its product to submit articles for advance screening to ensure that none of its editorial content is provocative or offensive (ibid.).

Curran's and Andersen's observations place *Adbusters* into the historical currents that tie together inextricably the magazine and advertising and their function within capitalist economies, a relationship that is far from neutral. The writers make explicit the inner connection between form and content by showing that adverts appearing in a magazine affect directly and indirectly editorial content. Therefore, they make clear that the mainstream magazine is an agent of consumerist ideology. With respect to the AMF, the question that arises from the argument Curran and Anderson make is: By borrowing the glossy-magazine form, is it possible for the AMF to simply turn around (i.e. detourn) or negate the medium's content?

Next, in an effort to show that they function much like advertisements, I explore in more detail the type of image the AMF uses to persuade visually. This discussion pursues further the sources of ambivalence that arise from within the organization's choice of media for its counter-hegemonic project.

THE AMF IMAGE

> *Corporations advertise. Culture jammers subvertise.*
>
> Lasn 1999:13

The AMF uses mainly visual means to formulate narratives about the creation of space for transformative struggles and to raise awareness about the social embeddedness of consumption. This strategy reflects the organization's commitment to a culture jamming agenda and the related technique of détournement, both of which I have discussed already. With these methods of (re)constructing meaning, the AMF taps into the high iconic literacy of late-capitalist societies.

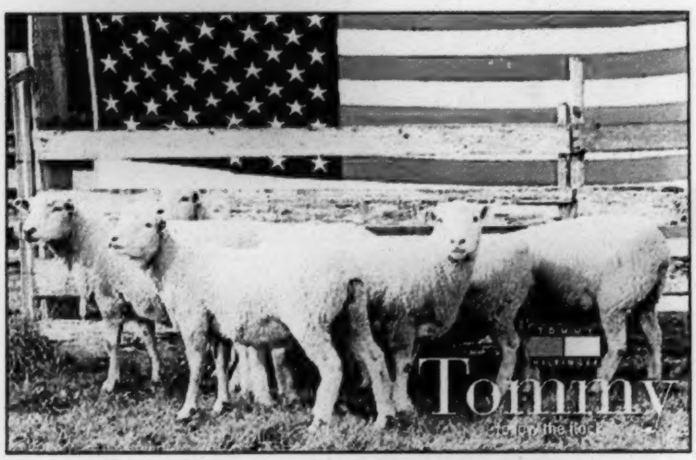

Fig. 3.1 AMF spoof-ad: Tommy Hilfinger – Follow the flock

The majority of AMF visuals function as subvertisements, that is, advertisement-like images with a subversive, anti-dominant culture message. A subcategory of this type of representation is the spoof-ad, an advertisement-like image that parodies well-known "real" ads using the same font and font size as well as overall design and similar slogans as the original. Lasn describes a spoof-ad as mimicking "the look and feel of the target ad, prompting the classic double take as viewers realize what they're seeing is in fact the very opposite of what they expected" (1999, 132). Figures 3.1 and 3.2 provide an example of this type of

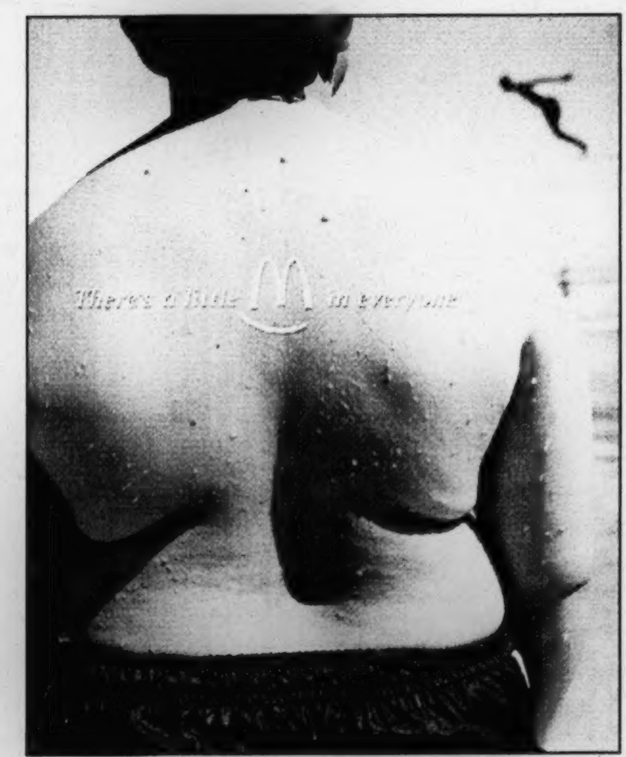

Fig. 3.2 AMF spoof-ad: There is a little McDonalds in everyone (*Adbusters* Nov/Dec 2002, back cover)

image the AMF produces, one that has been met with celebration by AMF supporters and non-activists alike. An indicator of the popularity of spoof-ads is their down-loadability from the AMF website and the fact that they are the only images that are available for purchase in the form of AMF calendars and postcards.

Spoof-ads function based on media piracy, which Norman Cowie defines as "ripping corporate images and slogans out of their bedrocks of common sense and mass-mediated nature by theft and appropriation" (Cowie 2000, 318). Media piracy is an active practice of deconstruction and reconstruction that "takes apart mass-media texts, and recombines their signifying elements (while sprinkling in a few new ones), all in the spirit of producing new and unexpected meanings and pleasures for readers who are already fluent in the modes of address of mass culture" (Cowie 2000, 319).

Cowie advocates this form of culture jamming for its ability to potentially foster media literacy. Although he does not assert that this type of media work alone can bring about social transformation, it represents an important first step in creating a media-literate and activist public, since it can do the following: (1) It can call into question issues of cultural ownership and political authority, as well as the relationships between the state and culture industries. (2) It can be used to focus attention on media institutions and the imperatives of a market economy. (3) It can foster a sophisticated understanding of media rhetoric in the deconstruction and reconstruction of mass-media texts. And (4) it is uniquely positioned to exploit the cracks and fissures in the New World transnational order (Cowie 2000, 321).

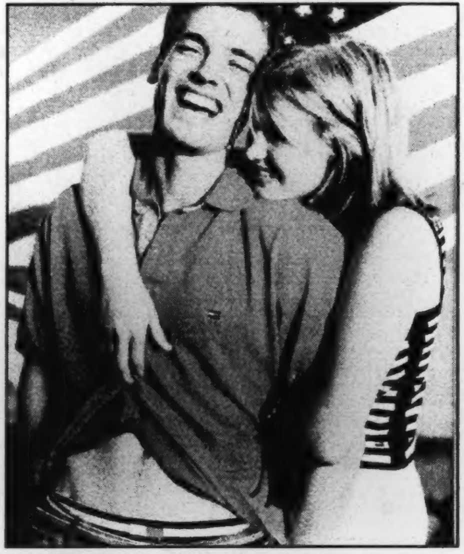

Fig. 3.3 AMF "real" ad: Tommy Hillfiger (*Adbusters* Jan/Feb 2003, 20)

Cowie's assertions about media piracy do not only apply to the AMF's spoof-ads, but also the organization's use of "real" ads. These "real" ads function as subvertisements in that an anti-dominant culture message rises not from the ad itself, but rather out of the unusual context into which it is placed. For example, a number of *Adbusters* issues contain fashion and United States Army ads, such as depicted in figures 3.3 and 3.4. While in a mainstream magazine these advertisements may go unquestioned, situated within *Adbusters* they are ironic, sarcastic, and even funny.

McLuhan and Barthes comment on the significance of this type of contextual construction of meaning. Barthes notes that the name of a publication represents a knowledge that can orientate strongly the reading of a message (Barthes 1978, 15). The placement of a US army ad in a subversive magazine that contains spoof-ads, narratives about surveillance, empire and terror as well as images of violent street protests, leads the reader to a deciphering of the ad that forces her/him to question its cultural and ideological claims. Interpreting the meaning of the ad in this context may include thoughts about patriotism and the role of the United States in global politics, economics and war. In other words, this case illustrates that context itself can define and shift a sign's signified. At the same time, although the reader is compelled to make a profound alternative interpretation since *Adbusters* is undoubtedly a subversive publication, the ad in this unusual context also evokes amusement. McLuhan points to the nature of ads to explain why this may be. He writes: "Any ad put into a new setting is funny [because] ads are not meant for conscious consumption" (1964, 228). While McLuhan points to the ephemeral quality of

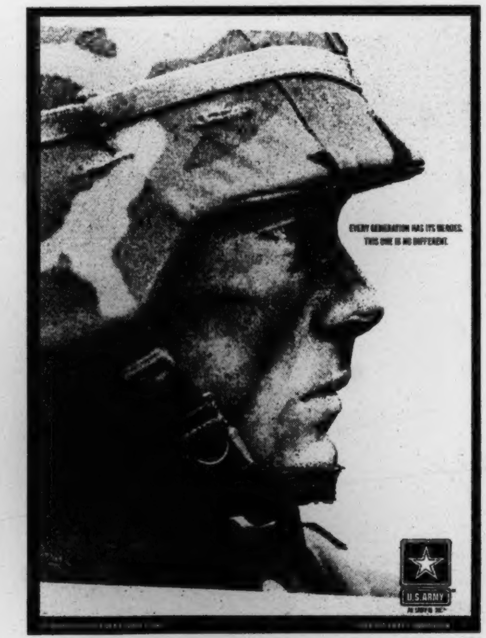
EVERY GENERATION HAS ITS HEROES.
THIS ONE IS NO DIFFERENT.
U.S. ARMY

Fig. 3.4 AMF "real" ad: US army (*Adbusters* Mar/Apr 2003, back cover)

ads, he also asserts that the environment into which an advertisement is placed determines how the reader perceives it. In this case, what is most significant is that the reader has to understand that the ad is not only a "real" one, but also that s/he is supposed to interpret it differently than in other contexts. The realization on part of the reader of this contextual understanding represents its entertainment value and possibly its critical force.

The photographic image takes centre stage in the vast majority of AMF representations such as subvertisements and spoof-ads, regardless of whether it makes the images itself or "borrows" them. Next, I examine why the photograph plays such an important role and how its nature determines its reception.

THE NATURE OF THE PHOTOGRAPH AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO TEXT

Since at least the 1930s, visual documentation has played a pivotal role in social and environmental issue campaigns such as the treatment of animals in research labs, child welfare and the relief of poverty and famine. Messaris argues that in the United States "the entire history of photography has been intimately associated with a variety of social movements that have used photographic evidence as rhetorical ammunition" (Messaris 1997, 137). For example, lobbying and publicity campaigns that lead to the establishment of Yosemite State Park (1864) and Yellowstone National Park (1872) relied extensively on photographs illustrating the spectacular natural phenomena these areas had to offer to people who had previously only heard of them.

The reason for why photographs are the foundation of most images that attempt to persuade is related to their nature. The photograph at once represents truths and lies, although its depiction of unmediated truths is much more apparent. Hebdige describes this quality as follows: "Simultaneously material and immaterial, they are at once signs and objects, documents of actual events, images of absent things and real things in themselves" (Hebdige 1988, 13). Barthes and Bazin also understand the ontological status of the photograph as always equivocal (Barthes 1978 and Bazin 1967).

This complex nature of the photograph is not immediately obvious. On the surface, the photograph lacks abstraction; it carries an air of being straightforward and easy to understand. Moreover, it seems to document and embody a form of evidential information. At the same time, however, especially when constructed to be persuasive, its composition is always highly intentional since it aims to evoke a very specific meaning and emotional response.

Due to the equivocal status of the photograph, when this type of image is intended as persuasive communication, it usually relies on text as a second structure to establish a more definitive statement. This is the case with the vast majority of AMF images. However, the relationship between text and image is more complex than it appears. Since visual syntax lack explicitness, arguments made with images often require to be supported by words (Myers 1997, 219). Roland Barthes takes this insight one step further by arguing that "the meaning of an image is never certain unless words ground it" (Barthes1991, 439). At the same time, Barthes claims that a merging of text and image cannot occur in absolute terms, for they represent 'heterogeneous' units. While they function together, " the totality of the information is … carried by two different structures" (Barthes 1978, 16). Due to the difference in how meaning is transmitted in linguistic and iconic systems, words that accompany an image can never duplicate its meaning. Rather, text can only make explicit certain aspects in the image.

To summarize, the AMF constructs a particular type of image that in order to be persuasive, relies on the nature of the photograph and its relationship with text. It is this same relationship that is integral to the functioning of ordinary product, service, or social advertisements. The AMF uses these and other techniques advertisers use to resignify and produce new memes, methods that make their images ad-like.

AMF IMAGES AS AD-LIKE

To describe AMF images as ad-like is plausible not only because they share characteristics but also because the AMF's founders and many of its contributors have a history of employment in the advertising industry.

Moreover, the organization sees *itself* as engaging in a form of advertising. For example, Lasn proclaims: "Corporations advertise. Culture jammers subvertise" (Lasn 1999, 131), thereby acknowledging the similarity between the two activities.

By relying on the structures of advertising, regardless of a general anti-consumerist and subversive stance, the AMF is unable to detach itself from its function in consumer society, for it entangles itself in its logic. We need to examine how the advertising image functions and understand the central role it plays in capitalist economies. Only then will we be able to appreciate or draw conclusions regarding the cultural politics of AMF rhetoric.

I suggest that the AMF images are ad-like, because the organization subvertisements and "real" advertisements share a number of characteristics. Among other features, both usually include photographic images, are constructed to persuade, stand on their own[13] and rely on text as well as such techniques as transference and reference to construct a message.

The advertisement image is unique compared to other types of images in the sense that it is highly intentional and deliberate but also because it aims to persuade its reader to believe something – in an idea, a product or both combined. This characteristic makes it a powerful tool of communication, one the AMF uses to pursue its goal of "cultural revolution[14]."

A long line of thinkers has explored this unique form of communication. Among them stands the work of Barthes, Williamson, Cortese, Kellner and Jhally. All of them portray advertising as tremendously powerful and one of the most important cultural factors forming and reflecting contemporary western life. For example, Barthes describes advertising as the site where the manufacturing of myth and signification are concentrated (Barthes 1973). Williamson (1978) argues that it embodies one of the most influential ideological forms in contemporary capitalist society. She also asserts that advertisements do not only function to sell goods to us, but it also to crate structures of meaning, thereby replacing that traditionally fulfilled by art or religion (Williamson [1978] 2000, 12). Cortese's insights echo those of Barthes and Williamson. He writes: "Advertising is one of the most powerful mechanisms through which members of a society assimilate their cultural heritage and cultural ideologies of domination" (Cortese 1999, 2). Furthermore, he argues that "[a]dvertising has become the predominant shared meaning system of postmodern society. Advertising not only tells us what to consume, but how to consume it" (Cortese 1999, 138).

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[13] In terms of constructing a message in itself that rarely requires immediate context form meaning making.

[14] "Cultural revolution is our business" is the title of the manifestos that have appeared in *Adbusters* since the October/November 2000 issue.

While the AMF foundation taps into this power of advertising, it also associates itself with its negative aspects. The advertisement critic Sut Jhally is only one of the countless scholars who attack the insidious nature of advertising. His comments are representative of the various aspects that writers point to in their assessments. Jhally describes advertising in the twentieth-century as the "most powerful and sustained system of propaganda in human history" whose "cumulative cultural effects, unless quickly checked, will be responsible for destroying the world as we know it" (Jhally 2000, 27). He goes on to argue that advertising's

> function is analogous to that of the drug-pusher on the street corner. As we try to break our addiction to things, it is there, constantly offering us another 'hit.' By persistently pushing the idea of the good life being connected to products and by colonizing every nook and cranny of the culture where alternative ideas could be raised, advertising is an important part of the creation of what Tibor Scitovsky (1976) calls 'the joyless economy.' Advertising "pushes us toward material things for satisfaction and away from the construction of social relationships, it pushes us down the road to increased economic production that is driving the coming environmental catastrophe. (2000: 32 - 37)

In "Rhetoric of the image" (in *Image, music, text)* Barthes asserts that "in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed *a priori* by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be to be transmitted as clearly as possible" (1978, 33). *Adbusters* images are equally intentional; their aim is to be persuasive.

The advertisement is unique in that it calls forth a particular relationship between itself and its reader. It demands from the reader to invest her/himself and attempts to compel the reader to invest herself/ himself within it. Williamson describes this process as follows. The reader

> must enter the space between signifier and signified, between what means and what it means. This place is that of the individual as subject: he or she is not a simple receiver but a creator of meaning. But the receiver is only a creator of meaning because he/she *has been called upon to be so.* As an advertisement speaks to us, we simultaneously create that speech (it means *to us*) and are created by it *as its creators* (it assumes that it means to us). Thus we are constituted as 'active receivers' by the ad. (Williamson 1978, 41)

At the same time, Williamson points out that advertisements speak to us "in a language we can recognize but a voice we can never identify." Subvertisements, like advertisements lack a subject, an identifiable speaker. Consequently, the reader becomes both listener and speaker, subject and object. With their subvertisements the AMF relies heavily, unlike most other movements engaged in producing social change, on anonymous speech. This form of communication makes difficult, if not impossible, a response outside of the reader who engages with it, for the message does not exist until s/he has created it through personal interpretation. The anonymity of the images prevents the reader and writer to engage in an exchange, imagined or real, making the work nothing more than an ephemeral experience of the individual.

By reprinting "real" ads, spoofing ads, and using structures of advertising to construct other subvertisements, the AMF is unable to separate itself from these characteristics of advertising, resulting in an uncomfortable relationship between the intended message of these representations and their form. At the same time, however, the AMF images also represent a unique type of persuasive visual communication. The most significant difference between advertisements and subvertisements lies in that the former represents one aspect of a system that perpetuates consumerism, while the later is intended to build an alternative to the same and usually does not attempt to sell products. Subvertisements also embody a type of hyper-ad because of their highly artistic quality, extreme use of referentials, of juxtaposition and high level of sophistication. While the AMF image taps into the pervasiveness of the publicity image, it lacks its ubiquity. It is this characteristic of advertising, however, in which lies its power (McLuhan 1964, 227). Consequently, because subvertisements lack the omni-presence of the publicity image it then follows that their impact is restricted severely.

The potential of ad-like images in the formation of alternative discourses

To summarize, the AMF takes part in promotional discourse by communication with media such as the glossy magazine and the advertisement-like image. While media and message clash, the AMF taps into one of the most powerful communication tools of our time, a power that is widely recognized. For example, Williamson concludes the foreword to her book *Decoding Advertisements* with the following statement: "The need for relationship and human meaning appropriated by advertising is one that, if only it was not diverted, could radically change the society we live in" (Williamson 1978, 14). The AMF tries to harness this potential, albeit within its context, a position that the AMF stands for explicitly. When asked in the interview if the AMF "is getting into an antipop popculture" with their various products, Lasn deflects this criticism by arguing that "culture jamming and subvertising are some of the few ways left to fight back against commercial media and consumer culture that has pretty much brainwashed us" (Hyman 1995). Writers commenting on advertising, even its critics, comment on the central role advertising plays in contemporary western society. For example, Serra Tinic suggests that "to recontextualize advertising we have to come to terms with the fact that ours is a consumer culture, and advertising may be one of its central symbolic structures" (1997, 23).

Subverting advertising as a form of communication represents an important step in publicizing the issues of progressive social movements. Jhally asserts that making social change "fun and sexy" is of utmost importance for those who pursue an anti-consumer society agenda (Jhally 2000, 34). He calls for finding ways of thinking about struggle against poverty and justice in terms of pleasure, fun, and happiness (ibid.). This "glamorizing" of social issues, however, is possible only if democratic access to media of mass communication becomes possible.

Aside from the tension that arises from using structures that are inseparable from the consumerist platform of advertising, the AMF's reliance on images to communicate its anti-consumerist messages brings with it difficulties. To explore in more detail the nature and the limitation of the subvertisements the AMF constructs, I conduct a semiotic analysis of a series of four images that appeared in *Adbusters* magazine.

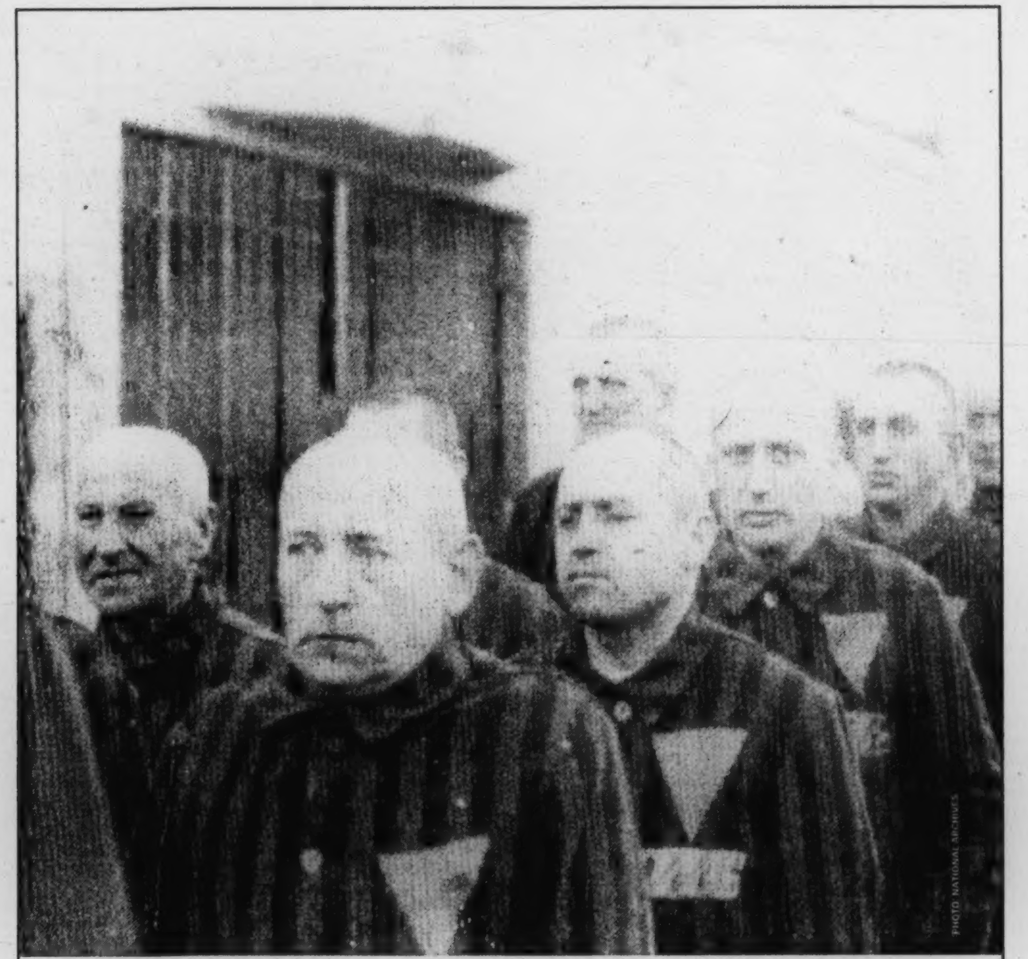


PHOTO: NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Fig. 3.5 "In relation to animals"

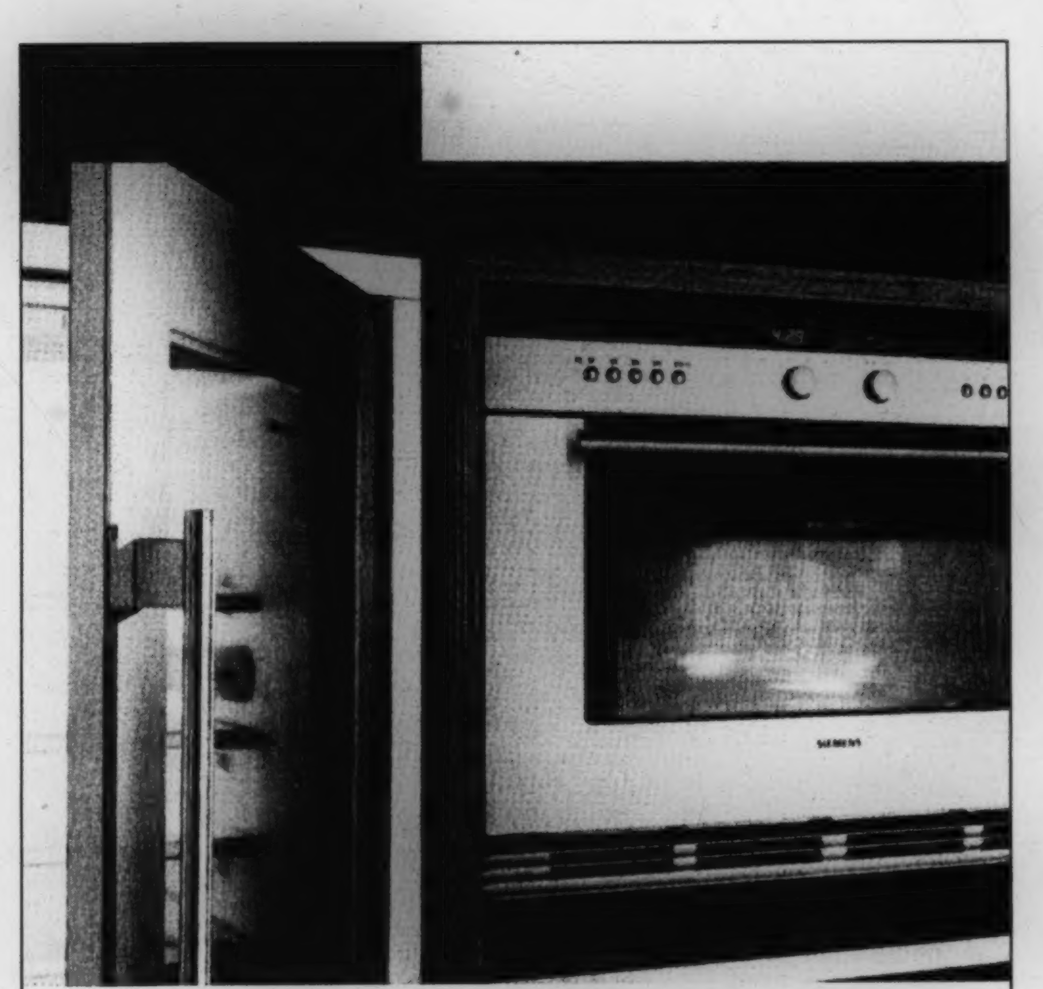


Fig. 3.6 "In relation to animals" Image 2

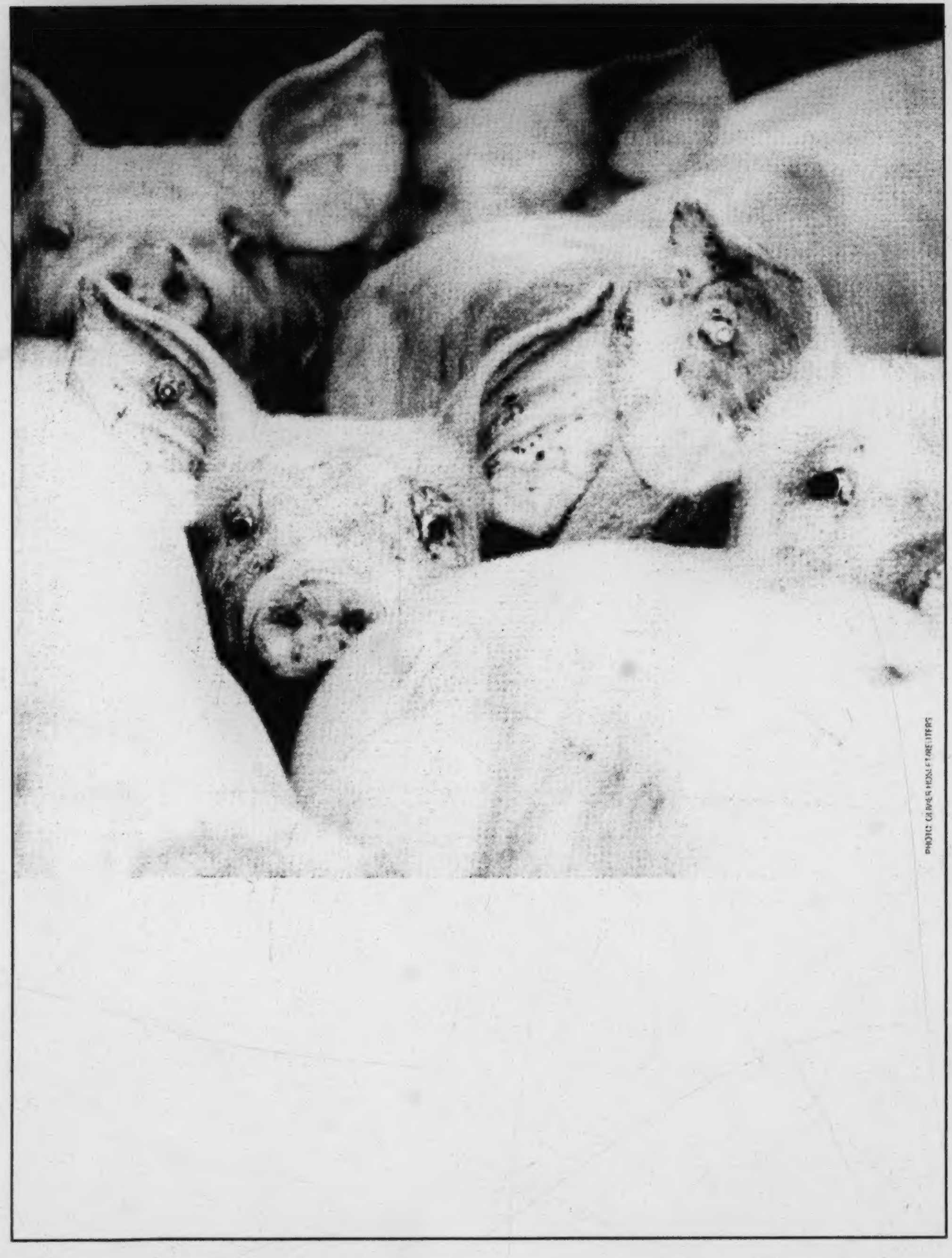
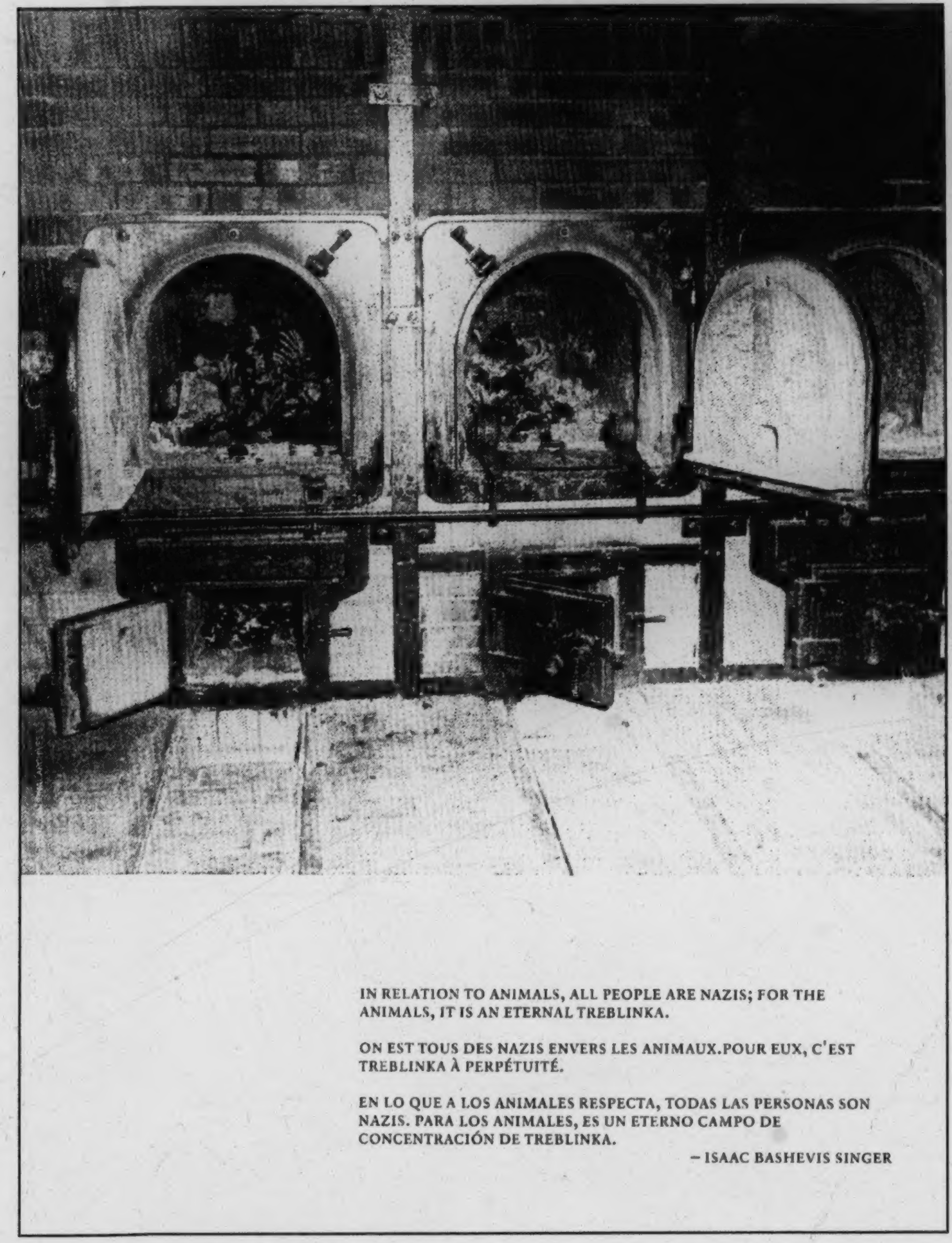


PHOTO: OLIVER HOSLET/REUTERS

Fig. 3.7 "In relation to animals" Image 3



IN RELATION TO ANIMALS, ALL PEOPLE ARE NAZIS; FOR THE ANIMALS, IT IS AN ETERNAL TREBLINKA.

ON EST TOUS DES NAZIS ENVERS LES ANIMAUX.POUR EUX, C'EST TREBLINKA À PERPÉTUITÉ.

EN LO QUE A LOS ANIMALES RESPECTA, TODAS LAS PERSONAS SON NAZIS. PARA LOS ANIMALES, ES UN ETERNO CAMPO DE CONCENTRACIÓN DE TREBLINKA.

– ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

Fig. 3.8 "In relation to animals" Image 4

"IN RELATION TO ANIMALS, ALL PEOPLE ARE NAZIS": AN ANALYSIS OF AN AMF SUBVERTISEMENT

In the November/December 2002 Issue of *Adbusters* magazine, over the course of four consecutive pages, unfolds a critical narrative about the consumption of meat and the human treatment animals (see fig. 3.5 – 3.8.) The series exemplifies how the AMF uses images in the form of subvertisements to construct alternative discourses about consumption. The following analysis of this series lays out how subvertisements function, highlighting how they construct meaning. For this study, I borrow tools from semiotics. Although I present a singular reading, other readers are likely to interpret the images and text in multiple, different ways, reflecting their particular personal history and socio-economic environment. At the same time, however, the series contains elements that guide the reader towards constructing meaning in a singular manner. In other words, it contains coded elements that direct her/him toward a preferred reading.

DESCRIPTION

The series that I refer to as "In relation to animals" consists of two black and white and two color photographs, spread over four pages. On the bottom of the fourth page, the following words that appear in English, French and Spanish anchor these images: "In relation to animals, all people are Nazis; for the animals, it is an eternal Treblinka. – Isaac Bashevis Singer."

The first image, a black and white photograph, depicts a group of men with shaven heads wearing striped concentration camp uniforms. Attached to the left side of the shirts are numbers and a single, large inverted triangle. Of the six visible faces, only two meet the beholder's eye. The man at the front of the image, and thus the closest to the reader, carries a more strained and severe expression on his face than any other person. His raised shoulders exacerbate his tense appearance.

Adjacent to the first image, a color photograph shows two modern ovens. The oven on the left has shelves and an upright glass door, framed in stainless steel, indicating an industrial setting. The oven on the right, carrying the brand name Siemens, is also made with glass and stainless steel. Since it open vertically, it looks like one common in a modern household. The combination of the two different types of ovens in one location suggests an industrial rather than a home setting.

The third image becomes visible on the left hand side when turning the page. This color photograph is that of heads and bodies of dirty, crowded looking pigs with yellow earmarks, facing the reader. They appear to be located at an industrial hog farm.

A black and white photo juxtaposes it on the right page. This fourth image shows a Nazi camp crematorium made up of three separate ovens, each with a larger upper compartment and a smaller lower compartment, surrounded by a single brick wall. Bones, and other undistinguishable materials, are visible in two ovens' upper compartments.

Small, hardly visible, white print, placed vertically along the spine of the magazine specifies the source of the first and last image as being the National Archives (presumably American) and the third as the photograph taken by Olivier Hoslet of Reuters. The magazine provides no source for the second image. Information that would indicate content is lacking for all images.

INTERPRETATION

Text

> *In relation to animals, all people are Nazis; for the animals, it is an eternal Treblinka.*
>
> Isaac Bashevis Singer

I begin with examining the text because it anchors the images, giving the reader instructions for how to interpret their ambiguous messages. Since the text appears on the last page of the series, it retroactively informs the reader about what narrative ties the images together. The most notable feature of the quote is that in the first phrase, it equates people and Nazis, while pointing to the similarity of people and animals in the second one. From the perspective of formal logic, humans=Nazis and animals=humans, produces the strange equation animals=Nazis, which begins to indicate the problematic claim of the quote.

The first part of the phrase, "In relation to animals, all people are Nazis," contains an unequivocal link between, and a value judgment about, the relationship of people with animals. It makes a sweeping statement that forbids exceptions; it includes all humans and thereby puts us and Nazis on the same plane of value. The term 'Nazis' has been synonymous with persons who perpetrated atrocities against millions of innocent people since the political and economic events that lead to the Second World War. It is a loaded term that makes reference to many historic events and processes ranging from Mussolini's Fascist regime in Italy, Kristalnacht, the persecution of Jews, homosexuals, Roma and Sinti, and many others, to Hitler's invasion of Germany's neighbors and even cultural artifact's such as Leni Riefenstahl's movie "Triumph of the will."

The second part of the phrase, "for the animals, it is an eternal Treblinka," specifies the treatment of animals by making an analogy that can only signify, for those familiar with the place, that animals and humans experience intense suffering equally. Singer locates animals in Treblinka, one of six Nazi extermination camps (*Vernichtungslager*)[15], established in 1941, 80 km northeast of Warsaw, Poland as a forced labor camp for those accused of crimes against the German occupation authorities. Jews, the vast majority of victims, from the Polish Districts of Warsaw, Radom, Bialystok, and Lublin, as well as others from Theresienstadt concentration camp, Macedonia and the Reich, comprised the nearly 750,000 people who died at Treblinka between July 1942 and April 1943, many within hours of their arrival[16]. Singers quote attempts to magnify the sense of horror that the reader can imagine people's experienced by transforming its specific location in time and place into infinity; all animals are condemned to Treblinka-like conditions permanently.

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[15] The other extermination camps were at Belzec, Sobibor, Chelmno, Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau, all in Russian-liberated Poland.

[16] http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shtetl/treblinka/ downloaded July 5, 2003

Equally as important as the content of the quotation, that of equating the treatment of animals with the atrocities of the Nazis and Treblinka, is the perception of its author. Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-1991), 1978 Nobel Laureate in Literature, was a prominent Polish Jew who emigrated from Poland to the United States in 1935. Even if the reader is not familiar with Singer's name and work, s/he can assume his Jewishness from his name. The significance of his being an identifiable Jew lies in a strong Jewish association with Holocaust discourse. Together, these attributes guide the reading of the series of images.

The phrase also shows that although quotations can be powerful persuaders, they can contain elements of dishonesty. Although Singer was a vegetarian who believed strongly in animal rights, and his family openly condones this use of his words, critics point out that the quote was not spoken directly by Singer. Rather, it comes from his novel "Enemies: A Love Story," published in English in 1972, when the main character muses on the plight of animals (CNN 2003).

Image one (fig. 3.5)

This image represents the most powerful of the four images, in part because it depicts human faces reflecting hopelessness and misery. It sets the tone for the narrative that the images and text construct. As a black and white photograph bearing the marks of time with its scratches and black and white spots, it carries an air of authority that derives from its association with historical documentation. Here it is important to note that the AMF could have digitally re-mastered the image, removing these flaws, but may have chosen not to retain this effect. The powerful impact of the image is compounded because photographs in general appear to represent the truth and seem straightforward. Consequently, the series is able to begin with the seriousness and force of familiar historical events to which the image alludes: the Holocaust, WWII, and other atrocities that took place in European countries during Fascist regimes.

The concentration camp picture functions well as the first image of the series because its content commands the readers' attention and interest, and also introduces the shocking tone of the series. Part of the strong impact derives from three men. The eyes of two men draw the reader into the image, while the expression and posture of the prisoner closest to the reader conveys human suffering.

The inverted triangles the men are wearing on their shirts are part of the classification system used in Nazi concentration camps. The badges sewed onto prisoner uniforms, for example pink for Homosexuals and purple for Jehovah's Witnesses, enabled guards to identify the alleged grounds for incarceration. Since the Nazi regime forced Jews to wear the yellow Star of David inside Nazi camps and throughout most of occupied Europe, the reader can infer that this image does not depict Jewish prisoners. Below, I will discuss why the matter of what group of people is shown is significant for the narrative of the series.

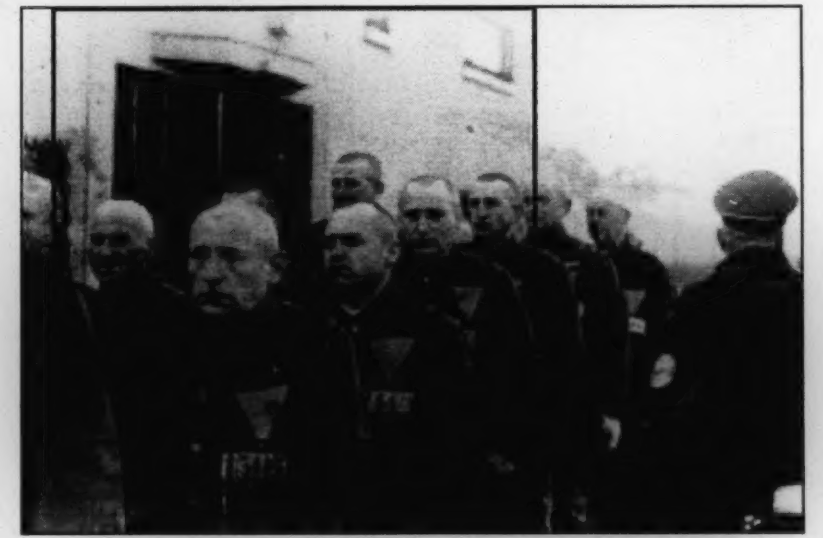

Fig. 3.9 Uniformed prisoners with triangular badges are assembled under Nazi guard at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp – Sachsenhausen, Germany 1938

How designers alter images gives insights into how s/he intends to guide their reading. The image reproduced in the magazine is also available on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website (USHMM 2 – see fig. 3.9). It identifies the photograph as "uniformed prisoners with triangular badges are assembled under Nazi guard at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp - Sachsenhausen, Germany, 1938." The USHMM photograph indicates the extent to which the *Adbusters* image was cropped in the process of making the series. The box inside the image indicates how the magazine represented the image, while the larger image is that downloaded from the museum website. The greatest difference in the content of both images derives from the presence and absence of the guards. For the purpose of the series however, the guards have little relevance. The stiffness in the postures, expressions on the faces, all positioned in the same direction, as well as the men's proximity to each other, implies that they are forced into this position and are under guard.

Another part of the picture that was eliminated in the *Adbusters* representation, and that at first glance seems less important than the removal of the guards, is the upper right side of the photograph that depicts the empty space behind the man who appears last in the line-up. By only including part of the face of this man, the image gains impact because it looks as though the men are part of a much larger group of people. Furthermore, depicting the heads and upper bodies of prisoners and eliminating the surrounding area brings the men closer to the reader while also fulfilling a graphic function that contributes to the powerful combined effect of the four images. I will discuss this technique further below.

Image two (fig. 3.6)

On the surface, this image is least burdened with symbolic and historical weight. The ovens depicted in this photograph are at first sight innocuous in the sense that ovens are used to prepare food. In the context of the other images and the text, however, the most pertinent feature of the oven on the right hand side becomes its brand name. Represented in this image is a product manufactured by the German company Siemens, whose notorious history includes close cooperation with the Hitler regime and profiting from slave labor provided in great part by concentration camps. For example, in 1942 Siemens constructed twenty work halls in close proximity to Ravensbrück women's concentration camp in which over 2,000 inmates performed slave labor. Even more shocking is the statistic that in 1943, thirty percent of Siemens workforce was composed of forced labor.[17] In recent years, Siemens has made headlines with its unwillingness to fully acknowledge its past and compensate former slave laborers.

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[17] Information from a project conducted at the Academy of Visual Arts (Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst) in Leipzig, German - www.hgb-leipzig.de/ravensbrueck/1/siemens.htm - May 21, 2003

Image three (fig. 3.7)

The pig has different symbolic meanings, such as luck and prosperity, but also impurity. This representation depicts them as crowded, dirty, and grotesque. In the context of the "Appetite" issue of *Adbusters*, these pigs show the source of a meat people consume. However, choosing the pig for this purpose is perplexing, given the tone and theme of the series, for Jews and Muslims have the custom of abstaining from pork.[18]

Image four (fig. 3.8)

The fourth and most shocking of the images in the series represents a method of disposing of bodies that leaves no evidence. The content of the image may be familiar to the reader partially because a single company, Topf & Söhne of Erfurt, Thuringia, produced the vast majority of the crematoriums (as well as gas chambers) used in concentration camps such as Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and Dachau. In the context of the series of images, specifically the first image of living prisoners in a concentration camp, the reader, in an effort to make meaning, must assume that the remains in the ovens are human.

TEXT AND IMAGES WORKING TOGETHER

Roland Barthes posits that "the meaning of an image is never certain unless words ground it" (Barthes 1991, 439). Without the linguistic message, the meaning of the separate and combined images of the series, as well as their arrangement and presentation, lack concreteness and embody abstractions that are open to endless interpretations. The absence of sources for the images exacerbates the ambiguity. Singer's words establish the meaning of the images with certainty. They limit the photographs' content and meaning to an equating of today's treatment of animals with the actions of the Nazi regime towards the people they classified as undesirable.

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[18] The prohibition is recorded in the Torah, in the book Leviticus, Chapter 11, verses 2 through 8.

Using the words of Isaac Bashevis Singer, a prominent Jew, bestows credibility upon the series' message and validates its claim. Here the question of ethnicity/religion is relevant, for it implies that if a Jew is willing to compare the victims of the Nazi regime with animals then it may be acceptable for others to do so as well. His identity also influences strongly the reading of the images. Whereas image one and four are representative of all Holocaust victims, the quote shifts the reader's focus onto the suffering of Jews. The quote implies that Nazis stand behind the misery depicted in the first and fourth image. This narrowing of perspective is not problematic in itself, but rather it becomes so in reference to the images, for it contributes to particular, even distorted readings of them. It builds a narrative that focuses on Jewish suffering and excludes the many other groups of people that fell victim to the same atrocities. More importantly, the reader may misinterpret the identity of the men. Rather than seeing political prisoners, homosexuals, or Jehovah Witnesses, s/he may now see only Jews. This interpretation may arise from not being familiar with identification systems of concentration and death camps or overwriting the visual information (absence of Star of David) with the textual.

The physical attributes of the series also influence how the reader approaches the series. It forces the reader to identify juxtapositions and leads her/him to engage with the material in a circular pattern. In other words, rather than understanding the narrative as unfolding from page one to four in order, its non-linear elements describe better how it functions. For example, since the images lack a description of content, the reader is compelled to reexamine the images after encountering the Singer quote. The reader has to flip through the magazine backwards in order to decode the message of the series in its entirety with this new piece of information.

Two juxtapositions that dominate the series and reiterate and illustrate the content of the quotation demand from the reader the ability to approach the series non-linearly. The first consist of the black and white (image 1 and image 4; fig. 3.5 and fig. 3.8) and the color images (image 2 and image 3; fig.

3.6 and fig. 3.7). They juxtapose the past and the present. The historical authority of the concentration/death camp images is amplified by their encasing of the contemporary ones. The second juxtaposition contains the "animals are like people" comparison more directly. It is made up of images showing the men at the concentration camp and the pigs (image 1 and image 3; fig. 3.5 and fig. 3.7) and the modern ovens and concentration camp crematorium (image 2 and image 4; fig. 3.6 and fig. 3.8). Here, the inanimate objects and living things juxtapose one another. The crowed appearance of the pigs and men reinforce graphically the equating of human and the pigs. Similarly, the open oven doors visible in the second and fourth photographs contribute to a mental pairing of the images.

The linking of the images to form a unit occurs not only through sequential arrangement and the narrative that connects them, but also through similarity in photographic style and their graphic design. The photographs are minimalist in design and content. Each portrays a singular idea that consumes the entire photograph: a group of men at a concentration camp, two ovens, pigs at an industrial farm, and a crematorium at a concentration camp. The background and foreground are eliminated, giving all attention to the singular message. The large white spaces beneath the photographs also serve as a linking mechanism that contributes to making the series a unit. At the same time, this technique draws in two images that appear immediately before the four page series. These function as transition from the content of the magazine that precedes and follows the series, as well as an introduction to it.

IMAGES AND TEXT IN CONTEXT

The analogy presented in the *Adbusters* series is part of a larger discourse. For example, animal rights activists frequently use Theodor Adorno's quote "Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they're only animals." The activist group PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) uses both Adorno's and Singers quote in the graphic campaign and exhibit "Holocaust on your Plate" that they launched in February 2003. It features a display consisting of eight 60-square-foot panels, each showing photos of factory farms and slaughterhouse scenes juxtaposed with disturbing images from Nazi death camps. One portrays emaciated nude men next to a starving cow. Another depicts a group of men in concentration camp bunk beds beside chickens stacked on top of each other in an industrial farm. Groups such as the Anti-Defamation League (an organization fighting anti-Semitism) have criticized severely this traveling exhibit and argue that it undermines "the struggle to understand the Holocaust and to find ways to make sure such catastrophes never happen again" (Anti-Defamation League).

Recently, the social historian and holocaust educator Charles Patterson published the book *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust (2002)* in which he extends the argument for the comparison represented in the "In Relation to Animals" series. In the Foreword of the book, Lucy Rosen Kaplen describes its content as follows:

> In Eternal Treblinka, not only are we shown the common roots of Nazi genocide and modern society's enslavement and slaughter of non-human animals in unprecedented detail, but for the first time we are presented with extensive evidence of the profoundly troubling connections between animal exploitation in the United States and Hitler's Final Solution. Dr. Patterson does not let us forget, moreover, that the practices of the quintessentially American institution of the slaughterhouse that served as a model for the slaughter of human beings during the Nazi Holocaust flourish to this day. (Kaplen 2003)

An appropriation of Holocaust symbolism has also occurred. During the 1970s, civil right activists began using the upright pink triangle as a pro-gay symbol, appropriating the inverted pink triangle homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps were forced to wear as identifier. By using the upright rather than inverted triangle, this use alludes to original use while also producing new meaning.

In the late 1980s, gay activists in New York formed the Silence=Death Project and began distributing posters around the city featuring the pink triangle on a black background with the words "Silence=Death," drawing further parallels between the Nazi period and AIDS crisis. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright argue that this appropriation empties the original symbol of its power "This act of appropriation and trans-coding, or changing the meaning of the original symbol, has important political meaning precisely because it empties the original symbol, here the pink triangle of its power (Sturken and Cartwright 2001,132). The trans-coding Sturken and Cartwright identify is absent from the *Adbusters* series of images. Rather, it represents a subvertisement that excludes a change of meaning of symbols of historical nature, thereby failing at détournement and simply presenting the reader with spectacle.

As an exemplar of a subvertisement and AMF's social marketing campaigns, the series illustrates the AMF employment of codes of advertising, such as the use of familiar and powerful reference systems, their transference of something real to a different idea, juxtaposition, the construction of a narrative through multiple images, anchoring of images with text, and presenting readers with shocking depictions.

The series also illustrates the vast knowledge required to make meaning of much of Adbuster's content, implying that it targets a narrowly defined audience. At the same time, this characteristic explains the appeal these images have. They are engaging in that they challenges the reader to decipher them. The instant reward in the decoding process lies in being able to construct a narrative that is intellectually meaningful.

The "In relation to animals" series illustrates that a system of meaning must already exist for ads and subvertisements to function. In this example, the reader's knowledge of the Holocaust is taken for granted. The Nazi regime's treatment of Jews must already be seen as deplorable to which the series simply refers. The series of images transfers significance from one idea to the other, thereby appropriating historical mythology to make a moral statement about the consumption of meat. Judith Williamson argues that this technique denies actual content in that "real events, or objects connected with real events, are hollowed out, as with other referent systems, leaving only the interiority of the subject, an inside without an outside, denying 'objective' historicity" (Williamson [1978]1984, 164). The hollowing out occurs in the series through its distortions. These consist of misrepresentations that I have described above, such as failing to mention that Singer's quote comes from fictional work, its focus on the experience of Jews, and the confusing information about the identity of concentration camp prisoners and their subsequent comparison with pigs.

Besides the specific aspects of the subvertisement, the analogy the "In Relation to Animals" series makes is highly problematic. The most apparent difficulty lies in the fact that victims of the Nazi regime were not killed for consumption. Furthermore, the series condemns a common practice and an important source of food. Making choices such as becoming a vegetarian or consuming organic meat produced from free-range animals is not an option for most people. Finally, the exploitation of the annihilation of various groups of people and consequent undermining of the complexities of the Nazi era in Europe renders this subvertisement weak and offensive, preventing the reader from truly engaging with the problems related to the treatment of animals and the consumption of meat.

CHAPTER 4: THE AMF - PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

> *What is at stake is who will control the production of meaning and the flow of information in the 21st century.*
>
> Kalle Lasn[19]

The activism of the Adbusters Media Foundation (AMF) is plagued by a particularly narrow and limited understanding of consumption in the contemporary world. Consumerism's structural foundation, namely the capitalist mode of production, remains largely unquestioned in its critique. The failure of the AMF to address the connection between consumption and production contributes significantly to the overall tension contained in its project. Most important, its focus on consumption presupposes consumer affluence to such a degree that necessities for survival, such as food, clothing, and shelter are satisfied for the vast majority of people. This framework takes for granted that the individual as consumer is financially able to make choices in the fulfillment of wants outside of the realm of basic necessities, thereby normalizing a middle-class identity as consumer.

Postmodern scholars, such as Fiske, stress the transformative powers and subversive pleasures that consumption entails (Fiske 1987, 1993, 2000). He suggests that though producers of objects of mass-consumption may inscribe these objects with preferred or dominant meanings, consumers are relatively free to interpret them on their own terms. For example, Fiske writes: "All the cultural industries can do is produce a repertoire of texts or cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use or reject in the ongoing process of producing their popular culture" (Fiske 1989, 23-24). The subjective life experience of the consumer determines how s/he decodes cultural products. At the same time, Fiske presupposes high semiotic literacy on part of the consumer that enables her/him to use consumption as a site of positive resistance by engaging in creative acts of willful textual subversion.

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[19] Kalle Lasn "Acting on the Cultural Environment: Media Carta" presented as part of Virtual Conference *The Right to Communicate and the Communication of Rights* 11 May 1998 to 26 June 1998 http://commposite.uqam.ca/videaz/docx/kalaen.html downloaded September 6, 2003

Together, the polysemic character that signs cultural products contain, the difference in consumers' life experience and high semiotic literacy culminate in consumption becoming a space of a "semiotic democracy."

Many scholars oppose Fiske's understanding of consumer culture. For example, John Clark (2000) and Jim McGuigan (2000) separately argue that a study of consumption can only occur in tandem with examining production and that Fiske overestimates the polysemic character of signs. Specifically, Clark calls for the reemphasis of the role and significance of production within the broader relationship it shares with consumption, as a focus only on consumption neglects that commodities are economic phenomena and therefore conceal a history of exploitation. He writes: "At the centre of any analysis of the contradictory place of consumption in modern capitalist societies must be a grasp of the economic relations and processes within which consumption is located" (2000, 288).

Although Fiske's approach makes room for cultural resistance and understands the subject as agent, Clark argues that it romanticizes the nature of this type of opposition, especially the polysemic character of signs. Clark reasons that both cultural and economic conditions limit of the relativization of meaning (2000, 292). Furthermore, alternative meanings presuppose the existence of alternative narratives. Clark goes as far as warning that that cultural resistance Fiske envisions has a regressive character: "Splitting subject through race, class, gender and other social identities" leads to passive rather than active dissent (2000, 293). Moreover, "the playfulness of postmodernism evokes precisely this state of emotional and/or political disinvestment: a refusal to be engaged" (ibid.). Clark concludes that there is "nothing intrinsic in the practice of alternative readings that requires them to promote the forging of larger collective identities of opposition" (ibid.).

McGuigan shares Clark's criticism of Fiske's general assumptions, specifically the fluidity of meaning of signs. He argues that Fiske's focus on notions of 'semiotic democracy,' and 'creative' and 'active' consumption practices provide "little space for transformative struggle of any kind" (2000, 295). In spite of the left-wing rhetoric and quasi-revolutionary conceptions of 'the people' in Fiske's writing, his construction of an autonomous consumer differs very little from the similarly autonomous consumer found in neoclassical economics. McGuigan sees Fiske's work as "theoretical convergence of an exclusively consumptionist cultural populism with right-wing political economy" that ultimately equates semiotic democracy with consumer sovereignty (2000, 96). By dismantling the myths of the sovereign consumer, such as perfect knowledge of what products are available to be consumed, that some consumers are more sovereign and more likely to consume particular products than others and that consumers are "rational" actors, McGuigan undermines fundamentally Fiske's theory of consumption.

To explore the tensions between production and consumption and their implication for emancipatory action in the case of the AMF, I draw on some of the first contributions social scientists made to the study of culture and its function in the oppression of subversive initiatives in late capitalism and consumer society. Fundamental to their understanding is the Marxist theory that capitalism functions on the principle of overproduction, which necessitates a shift in consumption patterns towards consuming more. Specifically, the rise of capitalism brought with it a new ideology of consumption that included the legitimating of ideas of leisure, fashion and style, spending, and individual fulfillment, facilitating the creation of demands for goods that had hitherto be considered superfluous.

THE AMF - WITHIN CONTEMPORARY RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION AND THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURE INDUSTRY

The work of the theorists associated with the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt represents one of the first attempts to examine the role of culture in perpetuating the conditions of inequality, exploitation, and alienation in capitalism. Established in 1921, this independent research institute for Marxist studies and the study of anti-Semitism gave birth to what to this day thrives as critical theory. Although the theorists associated with this school of thought do not embrace a singular theoretical stance, they share a critical Marxist perspective. Among the first generation of critical theorists, the work of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno (1903-1969) continues to influence greatly social and cultural theory. In the context of an analysis of the AMF's project, these theorists' understanding, although more than half a century old, provides important theoretical insights that help place its role and function historically.

The work of Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Adorno was an attempt to elaborate Marx's work by critiquing advanced capitalism and attacking instrumental rationality as a fundamental principle of capitalist society. The catastrophic historical events of the early twentieth century figure strongly in their writing: the First World War, economic chaos and inflation in the Weimar years, the Russian Revolution and its descent into Stalinist totalitarianism, the rise of National Socialism and Fascism, and enforced emigration and exile. Furthermore, rapid and unprecedented technological change, mass production, the emergence of the entertainment industry, the growth of mass media, and the manipulation of culture by the Nazis and other totalitarian regimes defined the questions with which these writers engaged. Despite the historical specificity of the origin, their work extends into the 21st century as the world continues to grapple with late capitalism.

Gilloch characterizes Benjamin as "a star in the current academic firmament" (2002, 11). The current popularity of his thoughts, and of those of Horkheimer and Adorno, reflects the complex and manifold ways in which their ideas are recognized as having special significance for, and resonance with, current social and cultural analysis. Rapacious consumption and all-pervasive commodification, the tumult of urban experience, the proliferation of new media technologies, the supersaturation of public and private spaces by images, and the destructive capacities and consequences of 'progress' and scientific knowledge have not diminished in importance, but are, on the contrary, even more amplified now than during these thinkers' lives

With the goals of this thesis in mind, I draw on Benjamin's "Author as Producer"([1934] 1973a)[20] and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical

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[20] Address delivered at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris on April 27, 1934, one year after Hitler became chancellor of Germany.

Reproduction" ([1934] 1968)[21], as well as Horkheimer and Adorno's "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"([1944] 2002) and Adorno's "Culture Industry Revisited" ([1975] 1991). Although these works only represent a small portion of their extensive contribution to social theory, they lay bare the heterogeneity of the Frankfurt School's understanding of mass and popular culture.

Gilloch describes Benjamin's work as " a significant counterpoint and corrective to the all too one-dimensional denunciation of the 'culture industry,' which emerged in the writings of Horkheimer and Adorno" ([1944] 2002, 8). For example, they write: "The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 99). The disparity in the views of the Frankfurt colleagues may derive in part from their different historical and geographical situations. Although Benjamin, like observed the powerful propaganda machines of Fascist regimes and the Soviet Union, as did Horkheimer and Adorno, he was not influenced by an extended stay in the United States. In 1940, Benjamin committed suicide in the Spanish border town of Port-Bou in fear of apprehension by the Gestapo[22]. Horkheimer and Adorno lived and worked in exile in the United States throughout the war. Their experience of the near total commodification of cultural life in the U.S., most prominent in Hollywood, contributed to Horkheimer and Adorno's pessimistic assessment of the course of Western historical development. To them, the American "culture industry" resembled closely the coordinated Volksgemeinschaft of Fascism. For example, they write:

> In America (radio)... takes on the deceptive form of a disinterested, impartial authority, which fits fascism like a glove. In fascism radio becomes the universal mouthpiece of the *Führer* ... To posit the human world as absolute, the false commandment, is the immanent tendency of radio. (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 129).

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[21] A more direct translation of the title of this essay is "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility" ("Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit.")

[22] Max Horkheimer had organized immigration papers for Benjamin for the United States.

Although the works emphasize disparate views in the study of popular culture within the Frankfurt School, the works of Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno, in their pursuit of contemplating the political potential of popular culture within the context of late capitalism, ask the same question. 'Can a dominant system be resisted using mechanisms that are vital to its functioning or does this strategy contribute to its continued existence?' From a Marxist perspective, they ask 'Can a revolutionary project use the tools of capitalism to overthrow it or does it contribute merely to its perpetuation?' With reference to these writers' works and in the framework of this thesis I consequently pose the following question: 'Can the AMF use the glossy magazine and advertisement-like images, media that are implicated in the everyday reproduction of the capitalist system, to attain revolutionary social and cultural change?' By examining this question, the stakes involved in such cultural-political praxis as the AMF pursues become clear.

WALTER BENJAMIN ON NEW MASS MEDIA IN LATE CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

I consider two of Walter Benjamin's works concerning the proletariat and technology that are marked by revolutionary optimism: "Author as Producer" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In these essays, Benjamin concerns himself with new media in capitalist society and attempts to develop a political understanding of intellectuals within the capitalist production process and the 'meltdown' of conventional bourgeois aesthetic forms and categories. Both works represent key components of his abiding concern for the transformation of contemporary culture and critical practice. At the same time, they are evidence of the great influence of Benjamin's friendship with the avant-garde communist playwright Bertholt Brecht. Horkheimer and Adorno lamented the gravitation of Benjamin's thinking towards Brechtian didacticism in the 1930s as "an unfortunate interruption, as an unnecessary distraction, and as an estrangement from his own genuine intellectual concerns" (Gilloch 2002,150), leading to the diminution of dialectical complexity and subtlety in Benjamin's work

(2002,149). They criticized Benjamin for his taking on Brechtian crude thinking (*plumpes Denken*). Benjamin himself, however, believed that 'crude thoughts'

> belong to the household of dialectical thinking precisely because they represent nothing other than the application of theory to practice, not its dependence on practice. Action can, of course, be as subtle as thought. But thought must be crude in order to come into its own in action. (Benjamin [1933]1973b, 81)

The essays I consider here complement one another. In "Author as Producer," Benjamin engages largely with questions relating to agency; he lays out the role the producer of culture has to take in creative revolutionary work. He argues that though new technologies and media can represent optimal forms for cultural resistance projects, they are subject to bourgeois appropriation and commodification. Self-identification as producer and her/his active transformation of production processes have the potential to counteract this tendency. In "The Work of Art," Benjamin turns to structural changes that make possible revolutionary action. His concept of aura provides the starting point for the democratizing of art and opens it up for its potential transformation into gaining progressive political use-value, for the loss of artworks' aura with the advent of mechanical reproduction, particularly with the invention of photography and film, detaches it from its ties to authenticity, tradition, and ritual.

Author as producer

In "Author as Producer," Benjamin provides direction for a study of revolutionary cultural projects by posing a narrower question than his colleagues Horkheimer and Adorno. Most pertinent for those interested in progressive social change is the evaluation of the efficacy of such efforts. In the context of this study of the AMF, the following questions arise: 'Is it as revolutionary as it claims to be?' and 'Does it challenge fundamentally underlying structures?' Although important, Benjamin argues that these questions in the tradition of critical materialism are difficult to answer. He proposes that rather than seeking to evaluate the position of a work vis-à-vis contemporary social production relations, a better question to ask is: 'What is its position within them?' (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 87). Consequently, the appropriate question in the framework of this thesis should be: 'What is the position of the AMF within today's relations of production?' Benjamin provides guidance for how to answer this query. In so doing, he does not merely offer a tool to evaluate cultural projects, but rather, proposes an action plan for social change.

Benjamin lays out a politically charged manifesto for producers of culture that can still guide our cultural-political projects in more revolutionary directions. Two overarching concerns direct his argument: the first being how technologies affect the form of revolutionary action, and second being the perpetual threat of bourgeois appropriation and commodification of resistance.

The impact of technology on the form of revolutionary action

Benjamin was one of the first thinkers to contemplate how technological changes in late capitalism alter how we experience ourselves and the world around us. In his attempt to lay out the role of intellectuals in revolutionary struggle, Benjamin emphasizes that they must situate their project historically, taking into consideration the ways technology transforms not only living social relations, but also makes available new or different tools to achieve political and social change. He writes that "in the light of technical realities of our situation today, we must rethink the notions of literary forms or genres if we are to find forms appropriate to the literary energy of our time" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 89). In other words, technological progress brings with it not only new avenues to pursue revolutionary action, but rather, it plays a pivotal role. Benjamin goes as far as stating that "technical progress is, for the author as producer, *the basis* of his political progress"(Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 95; italics added). It then follows, that revolutionaries must tap into the technological spirit of the time to bring about change by making useful technologies their own, as well as pursuing technical innovation themselves. For Benjamin, the importance of technical progress lies in part in that it enables authors to become polytechnical producers, which consequently contributes to their ability to transform intellectual production, giving it revolutionary use-value. I address more closely his ideas about the transformation of production below.

In describing the nature of technological progress and its effects on media, Benjamin also highlights its dialectical character. For example, he sees his contemporary state of literature as having been affected tremendously by technological developments and capitalist production. These changes led to a melting down of forms, where older literary genres lost relevance and new ones arose (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 89). For example, on one hand, these new realities brought with them new forms of the newspaper in which readers appeared to be able to contribute to its content in the form of the publication of reader's letters and columns. Although Benjamin does not expand on the value of this change, he implies that this unselective assimilation of readers and facts contributes to the qualitative decline of the newspaper controlled by capital. On the other hand, while the contemporary newspaper signifies "the decline of literature in the bourgeois press" it opens up potential for its revolutionary political use to evolve, for "as literature gains in breadth what it looses in depth, so the distinction between author and public ... is beginning to disappear" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 90). The merging of the writer and reader signals that "the newspaper ... becomes the very place where a rescue operation can be mounted" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 96). In other words, even while the contemporary press is the hands of capital, this medium contains tendencies that permit the proletariat to gain access to authorship. Although Benjamin provides the example of the Soviet press that was becoming common property after the Russian Revolution, he fails to discuss how the proletariat could overcome the limitations set by bourgeois ownership of the press in capitalist societies.

Even though discussed at greater length in "The Work of Art," the function of technological progress also represents an important element in Benjamin's argument in "Author as Producer" because it embodies a dynamic view of history that brings with it the possibility for progressive or regressive economic and social change. In conjunction with technique[23], the political potential of technological progress makes space where agency can unfold, especially in the counteracting of bourgeois appropriation and commodification of resistance efforts.

THE APPROPRIATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF RESISTANCE, THE AUTHOR AS PRODUCER, AND STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

Technological progress leading to the creation of new media, either in function or form, does not only bring with it new methods by which the proletariat is able to pursue resistance but also transforms ways in which the dominant system propagates itself and neutralizes anti-systemic tendencies. Benjamin is acutely aware of the threat of bourgeois appropriation and commodification of cultural resistance initiatives. He writes:

> We are confronted with the fact – of which there has been no shortage of proof in Germany over the last decade – that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication is capable of assimilating, indeed of propagating, an astonishing amount of revolutionary themes without ever seriously putting into question its own continued existence or that of the class it owns (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 94).

This neutralization of resistance hampers progressive social change initiatives.

For Benjamin, the role many left-wing intellectuals and artists play in their work supports this process. For example, in the work of the New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*)[24] Benjamin saw a conversion of revolutionary reflexes "into themes of entertainment and amusement which can be fitted without much difficulty into the cabaret life of a large city" (Benjamin [1934]

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[23] The manner in which an artist, performer, or athlete displays or manages the formal aspect of her skill. (New Penguin English dictionary)

[24] Neue Sachlichkeit was a group of German artists and writers in the 1920s whose works were executed in a realistic style (in contrast to the prevailing styles of Expressionism and Abstraction) and who reflected what was characterized as the resignation and cynicism of the post-World War I period in Germany.

1973a, 96). Moving from the lesser charge of appropriation to indicting this group of artists and writers on grounds of commodifying resistance, he writes:

> The characteristic feature of this literature is the way it transforms political struggle so that it ceases to be a compelling motive for decision and becomes an object of comfortable contemplation; it ceases to be a means of production and becomes an article of consumption. (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 97)

Benjamin extends this criticism to left-radical writers such as Kurt Tucholsky and Erich Kästner. He characterizes their work as follows: "Their function, viewed politically, is to bring forth not parties but cliques; viewed from the literary angle, not schools but fashions; viewed economically, not producers but agents" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 97). Here, Benjamin suggests that left-radical intellectuals and artists take part in this assimilation and commodification of revolutionary themes when they fail to identify themselves as producers and do not actively transform the production process in which they are involved.

In his effort to position the intellectual in the class struggle and counteract appropriation and commodification of revolutionary themes, Benjamin demands that s/he places her/himself into the production process. He argues that "the place of the intellectual in the class struggle can only be determined, or better still chosen, on the basis of his position within the production process" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 93). Understanding her/himself as occupying a place within production brings with it a redefinition of the self. In this context, the question of whether the intent of an intellectual's work is revolutionary loses relevance when s/he positions herself between classes. Benjamin writes: "Political commitment, however revolutionary it may seem, functions in a counter-revolutionary way, so long as the writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat only in the mind and not as a producer" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 91). This alignment with the proletariat embodies the prerequisite for a transformation of production. In other words, once the author sees her/himself as producer, s/he gains control the production process and is consequently able to shape it toward taking on revolutionary use-value.

For Benjamin, this transformation is imperative for left-wing intellectuals. He argues that to "supply a production apparatus without trying, within the limit of the possible, to change it, is a highly disputable activity even when the material supplied appears to be of a revolutionary nature" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 94). Here, Benjamin differentiates between those who feed bourgeois culture and those who refunction it. He criticizes severely the left intellectual "who refuses as a matter of principle to improve the production apparatus and so pries it away from the ruling class for the benefit of Socialism" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 94). To define the role of revolutionary writers and explore the transformation of production apparatuses, Benjamin applies Bertholt Brecht's concept 'Umfunktionierung' (refunctioning or structural transformation), "the transformation of forms and instruments of production by a progressive intelligentsia interested in liberating the means of production and hence active in the class struggle" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 93).

The importance of this structural transformation, one that involves technical innovation, lies in the idea that production processes can function in the service of both the left and the right, for technologies and media do not inherently lean ideologically in either direction. Therefore, the proletariat and the bourgeois can equally make use of the same media to fulfill their political, social, and economic interests. At the same time, however, while the newspaper is "the writer's most important strategic position, ... this position is in the hands of the enemy" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 91). Consequently, revolutionary intellectuals have to overcome two hurdles: the bourgeois ownership of the means of production and the appropriation of revolutionary tendencies. Benjamin gives no indication of how the proletariat can gain ownership of the means of production. He does explore, however, what form the production of photography has to take when left unaltered and left-wing intellectuals only supplied it. At the same time, by highlighting the dialectical nature of photography, Benjamin illustrates how the structural transformation of production apparatuses can challenge capitalism fundamentally.

In his discussion of photography, Benjamin differentiates between photoreportage and photomontage. In photoreportage, the everyday is aestheticized and provides "entertainment and amusement" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 96); the work of the New Objectivity represents an example of this type of use of photography, for it succeeded "in turning abject poverty itself, by handling it in a modish, technically perfect way, into an object of enjoyment" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 95). It then follows that, by not changing how photographs function, photo's creators take on the role of perpetuating and deepening an oppressive system. In opposition to photoreportage stands photomontage, "a practice wherein mundane images and textual elements are juxtaposed with explosive (often bitingly satirical) effect" (Gilloch 2002,148). This use of photography emancipates its medium from the service of the bourgeois. As an example, Benjamin cites John Heartfield's turning of book jackets into a political instrument[25]. While working on *Die Neue Jugend* (1916), a journal opposing the First World War, Heartfield (1891-1968), a trained graphic designer who had previously worked in the area of product packaging, and George Gosz[26] (1893-1959) began developing the technique that later became known as political photomontage. The French writer Louis Aragon describes Heartfield's work as "art in Lenin's sense for it is a weapon in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat" (Herzfelde 1971, 336). Furthermore, he argues that in this type of art, "the photograph stands as a challenge to painting and is released from its imitative function and used for their own poetic purpose" (Herzfelde 1971, 334). Seen in this light, political photomontage refunctions the photograph in such a way that it communicates and builds critical consciousness. This example of structural transformation, however, does not address who controls the space in which publication takes place and how its producers, who stand in opposition to the owners of the means of production, are able to cover the cost of the production of photomontage. In the case of Heartfield, he was able to create his revolutionary artworks in part because his brother's publishing company, the Malik-Verlag, provided a platform. The question of how revolutionary cultural works gain access to public space and therefore the mainstream remains unanswered.

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[25] John Heartfield was born in 1891 as Helmut Herzfelde. He changed his name protest Word War I. His politically charged photomontages display his opposition of the Weimar Republic and Nazi regime.

[26] German painter, draftsman and illustrator and member of New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit.)

In his discussion of structural transformation, Benjamin refers to Marx's notion of alienation, specifically the alienation of the producer from the object he produces. Key to making the work of intellectuals potentially revolutionary is the bringing together of all aspects of its production, a process that requires polytechnical abilities on part of the producer. Benjamin argues that "the barrier of competence must be broken down by each of the productive forces they were created to separate, acting in concert" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 95). Furthermore, he writes: "Intellectual production cannot become politically useful until the separate spheres of competence to which, according to the bourgeois view, the process of intellectual production owns its order, have to be surmounted" (ibid.). For example, in the press, photography and writing have to merge so that the same person creates the photograph and provides its caption. Benjamin demands of the person who produces the photograph the ability to "put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value" (ibid.). It then follows that, to transform the press photograph, the photographer has to become a writer and the writer has to become a photographer.

Benjamin does not construct structural transformation as an individual's project. Rather, he emphasizes the pedagogical element that is pivotal in its efforts to succeed. Benjamin writes:

> (A) writer's production must have the character of a model: it must be able to instruct other writers in their production and, secondly, it must be able to place an improved apparatus at their disposal. This apparatus will be the better, the more consumers it brings in contact with the production process" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 98).

In other words, only by teaching others how to take part in working toward progressive social change through engaging in a social project that transforms the production processes they are involved in, can a refunctioning be successful.

THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

> 'Fiat ars - pereat mundus[27],' *says Fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology. This is evidently the consummation of 'l'art pour l'art.' Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.*
>
> *Benjamin* [1934] 1968, *242*

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin introduces into the theory of art concepts that according to him "are useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art" ([1934] 1968, 218). Specifically, he is concerned with anti-systemic tendencies within capitalism. Pursuing a dialectical analysis, he sees the bourgeoisie as exploiting the proletariat at an increasing intensity, while also being able to identify conditions that have the potential to lead to abolishing capitalism. According to Benjamin, the value of his work lies in its potential to function as a weapon in the class struggle (it has *Kampfwert*) to counteract what he understands as an aestheticization of politics and war that was turning politics into a wonderful, and even beautiful, spectacle. His ideas of culture, reproduction, and commodity fetishism and their application to the mass media in late capitalist society led him to view technological advances that affected mass communication as potentially emancipatory.

The point of departure in Benjamin's essay is the thesis that although artworks have always been reproducible in principle, the potential for mechanical reproduction that became possible with the technological developments of the industrial revolution represents something new. The most important concept Benjamin develops in this context is that of aura, a term he first introduced in his "Small History of Photography" (1931). This much debated concept is intriguing in part because Benjamin does not define it precisely. For example, Gilloch describes Benjamin uses of the term aura as "fascinating and provocative, but (or perhaps because) infuriatingly imprecise and inconsistent" (Benjamin [1934] 1968, 164). At the same time, however, the concept of aura allows Benjamin to address the dramatic change of the social function of art with the coming of mechanical reproduction. He asserts that reproducibility brings with it a transformation of art from having ties to authenticity, tradition, and ritual, all of which are inextricably bound to authority, to it having democratic and emancipatory use-value.

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[27] Let art be created even though the world shall perish.

Aura and its link to tradition, ritual, and authenticity

Mechanical reproducibility changes dramatically the role of art in society. It set into motion a cultural shift that, in terms of images, began with printmaking techniques such as engraving, etching, and woodcuts developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and lithography in the early nineteenth century and accelerated to an unprecedented speed with the development of the photograph. Before these technologies made possible unlimited reproduction, art was defined by its uniqueness in time and space, or what Benjamin termed 'aura,' defined it.

Benjamin works with the term aura in a descriptive fashion rather than defining it concretely. He describes aura as "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin [1934] 1968, 221). For him, the term also implies "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (ibid.). Aura is the quality of transcendence or magical power, the characteristic of art that connects it to the sacred. Benjamin illustrates the idea further with reference to the aura of natural object. He writes: "If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch" ([1934] 1968, 223).

In the process of characterizing 'aura,' Benjamin juxtaposes non-auratic and auratic phenomena. For example, "Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazine and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitorines and reproducibility in the former" (Benjamin [1934] 1968, 223). The lack of aura, rather than aura itself, represents the key to Benjamin's argument and this thesis in particular. He argues that with the replacement of the uniquely made with the mass produced, the work of art loses its aura.

Eugene Lunn points out that though Benjamin appears to draw on Max Weber's notion of disenchantment (*Entzauberung*, literally "demagification"), he does so in a positive manner, for he argues that reproducibility "strip[s] the idealistic and theological 'halo' away from our perceptions of human relationships" (Lunn 1982, 152). For Benjamin, the loss of aura brings with it new possibilities and hope, as it opens up opportunities for the democratization and politicization of art and consequently the liberation of the oppressed. By taking this stance, he opposes the view of his colleagues and friends, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, who understand technological transformations of the production and function of art as bringing with it new and more ways of enslaving the masses rather than potentially freeing them.

Benjamin holds aura to be profoundly undemocratic, as it implies that the means of artistic production lie in the hands of the rich and powerful who exploit art to maintain control over the masses. However, with the advent of mechanical reproduction, particularly of still photography and film, the foundations of this relationship changed radically. This type of reproducibility permits the masses to participate in the production of art and gives it meaning by either taking photographs of a work of art, or at least buying a cheap photograph or postcard of the work. Benjamin's idea was that once the work of art's aura has withered away as a consequence of its reproducibility, the process of reproduction brings art objects closer to a mass audience.

What makes the concept of aura important is the implication of its loss on the social function of art, for its dwindling also brings with it an artwork's detachment from authenticity, tradition, and ritual - all of which have a link to authority. Benjamin's critique of the cultic origins of the 'authentic' work of art and his advocacy instead of film and photography as critical and popular media ran directly counter to Adorno's insistence on the critical role of 'autonomous art' and the 'infantilizaiton' of mass media audiences (Gilloch 2002,19). Benjamin defines authenticity as "the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (Benjamin [1934] 1968, 221). Therefore, authenticity presupposes the existence of an original. Based on this conceptualization, he argues that reproduction jeopardizes authenticity, for substantive duration loses all relevance. Consequently, "the whole sphere of authenticity is outside … reproducibility" ([1934] 1968, 220). Benjamin provides the example of the photographic negative from which one can make an unlimited number of prints. From this perspective, talking about one 'authentic' print fails to make sense for two reasons. First, "process reproduction is more independent of the original than manual reproduction" (ibid.). The reproduction process can capture aspects that the naked eye is unable to perceive, such as through enlargement of a photograph or slow motion in film. Second, "technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of the reach for the original itself" (ibid.). In other words, art and its viewer can encounter each other in new dimensions of space and time, which Benjamin describes as follows: "The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room" ([1934] 1968, 221)[28].

At the same time as authenticity ceases to have relevance, the artwork's tie to tradition is broken. In Benjamin's words, "the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition" ([1934] 1968, 223). Benjamin argues that "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" ([1934] 1968, 221). Reproduction has this effect by replacing the unique artwork with a plurality of copies, and the beholder meets artwork in his/her own situation, reactivating the object reproduced. These processes "lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind" (ibid.). While auratic art is connected to tradition and authenticity, it is also bound to its original use value, its basis in ritual.

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[28] Like Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno also declare authenticity in creative expression as a concept that no longer has relevance in late capitalism. Culture industry "has rendered cultural conservatism's distinction between genuine and artificial style obsolete" (H&A: 102).

Auratic art, so Benjamin argues, "is never entirely separated from its ritual function" ([1934] 1968, 224). With reproducibility, Benjamin sees a historical rupture that frees art, emancipating it "from its parasitical dependence on ritual" (ibid.), bringing with it a profound change in the function of art. He writes: "Instead of being based on ritual, [art] begins to be based on another practice - politics" (ibid.). This reversal in function represents the key to placing art into the service of efforts pursuing just societies.

From aestheticizing politics to politicizing art

Pursuing a dialectical analysis, Benjamin sees mechanical reproduction as potentially emancipatory for the masses, but argues simultaneously that the same forces of capitalism, commodification, and Fascism that were largely responsible for the development of mechanical reproduction also impede this emancipation. Although the loss of aura brings with it the potential for creative works to be emancipatory, Benjamin was intensely aware of what he saw as political attempts to undermine mass emancipation in the age of mechanical reproduction. Specifically, he understood what he called the aestheticization of politics as the method whereby groups like Fascist regimes weakened subversive tendencies. Lunn describes this process as the "substitution of 'intoxicating' warfare for concrete social changes beneficial to the masses" (1982, 20). From his observations of the rise and triumph of Fascism, Benjamin discerns a clear link between war and the beautifying of politics: "All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war" (Benjamin [1934] 1968, 241).

Although situated within one of the darkest chapters in recent history, Benjamin presents an optimistic account of cultural praxis that theorizes how reproducibility inherently brings with it the potential for the development of just societies. In "The Work of Art," Benjamin reemphasizes an argument he presented in "Author as Producer." Only by transforming production processes, and more specifically making creative works the product of those who traditionally only consume these products, can one tap into and counteract the oppressive uses of technologies and art.

Turning readers into writers

The development of new media technologies in the late 1800s and early 20th century, such as phonographs, epic theatre, and especially film and photography, not only destroyed art's "aura" but demystified the process of making art, making the creative process accessible and changing the role of art in mass culture. Technical reproduction has brought the ordinary person closer to material cultural products in that they can take part in their creation. The "reader gains access to authorship" and consequently, "the distinction between author and public looses its basic character" (Benjamin [1934] 1968, 232). In other words, the spectator becomes a participant and collaborator and, finally, author in the production of culture.

Benjamin had great faith in the emancipatory potential of new technologies. He argues that the expansion of the press inevitably leads to a blurring of the distinction between author and reader as the readership turns into writers. He writes:

> With the increasing extension of the press, which kept placing new political, religious, scientific, professional, and local organs before the readers, an increasing number of readers became writers - at first, occasional ones. It began with the daily press opening to its readers space for 'letters to the editor.' And today there is hardly a gainfully employed European who

> could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other comments on his work, grievances, documentary reports, or that sort of thing. Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer. ... Literary license is now founded on polytechnic rather than specialized training and thus becomes common property (Benjamin [1934] 1968, 232).

In other words, Benjamin understood the state of technology in the 1930s in Western Europe as being at a level where it was possible, if revolutionaries tapped into its potential, for all those who had until this point only consumed creative works to also produce them.

The AMF: Toward problematizing production

From the perspective of the thoughts Benjamin lays out in "Author as Producer" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," I examine the AMF's project in terms of how it follows his vision of revolutionary action. I modify the inquiry in which he engages in "Author as Producer" and pose the question 'What is the position of the AMF within today's relations of production?' For this purpose, I consider what role technology plays as well as how the organization transforms and refunctions production processes and media, turns readers into writers, and politicizes art.

Technology

The philosophy and activities of the AMF reflect the historical specificity of potential tools and types of actions that are effective for revolutionary projects, an idea Benjamin emphasizes in the works discussed above. More specifically, the organization attempts to tap into the spirit of our time by approaching cultural change largely iconically, for it understands the contemporary world as an age where the image plays a great role in communicating ideas, and a time when the written word is losing significance.

Choosing to communicate with these media brings with it the necessity to apply the latest technologies in order to minimize costs involved in the preparation and dissemination of activist materials. Consequently, the work of the AMF is impossible to imagine without the technological advances of the past fifteen years, most of all in the area of computing. For example, producing a glossy, image rich, bi-monthly magazine should be an overwhelmingly costly endeavor. However, reflecting on the expense of creating *Adbusters*, Lasn remarks that by "using the latest hardware and software available, the cost of producing this sort of magazine is actually quite low" (Hyman 1995).

The pivotal role technology plays does not only apply to publishing a glossy, high-quality magazine but also to the methods the AMF uses to pursue its goals. The organization promotes culture jamming as the primary tool by which activists can engage in 'cultural revolution' and oppose consumer culture. This type of activism is possible only through the availability, accessibility, and low price of computers and graphic software, as well as widespread experience with these technologies. For example, producing a spoof-ad or subvertisement, such as the AMF website lays it out in "How to create your own print ad" takes for granted access to these resources (Creative Resistance 2003).

Equally as important as computer software and hardware for the production of materials is the role they play in the dissemination of the organization's ideas. For the distribution of activist resources, the AMF relies heavily on one of the newest and most important media of our time, the Internet. This technology allows the organization to communicate inexpensively, efficiently, and quickly with people all over the world. Besides its importance in the global distribution of materials to those already participating in the movement, the Internet is unique in its tremendous potential to spread ideas, not only geographically but also to large percentages of particular populations. At the same time, however, high-tech idea dissemination inevitably restricts severely the number of people who can receive messages, participate in projects, and follow the AMF call to action by creating their culture jams.

Transformation of production processes and media

Besides the historical, and thereby implied cultural, specificity of the form of revolutionary action, Benjamin shows how and why popular media of mass communication do not inevitably lie in the hands and the service of corporate and reactionary interests. He emphasizes the importance of transforming production in the processes of conceptualizing and executing social change where the creative actor "will never be concerned with products alone, but always, at the same time, with the means of production. In other words, his products must possess an organizing function besides and before their character as finished works" (Benjamin [1934] 1973a, 98). This argument presupposes a great deal of autonomy for producers of culture, including a degree of control over means of production. Since Benjamin's time, however, media conglomerates have continued to monopolize airwaves and printing presses and increasingly exclude alternative voices. The AMF's project is unable to challenge substantially this reality, in part because it pursues a self-contained project that fails to put into place mechanisms that bring with them structural transformations and encourage other social movement organizations to follow into their footsteps. Rather than pursuing a refunctioning of a medium previously controlled by bourgeois interests into a radical one, the organization gathers resources to build itself independently. At the same time, the AMF does little to educate activists in how they can follow their example by providing resources and teaching them how to publish their own magazines, make videos, and more generally, organize a progressive social movement initiative in the form of publishing and community media coops. This lack of a well-developed critical pedagogical dimension reveals itself further in how the organization describes consumer culture. Its materials focus largely on its manifestations in grand terms, such as at the level of mega-corporations and national governments, like the Gap, McDonalds, and the US administration, rather than more immediate and local non-branded exploitation.

Despite characteristics that undermine the potential for systemic transformations, in some respects the AMF demonstrates a degree of refunctioning of media. It does so in the sense that the organization makes them its own. In John Heartfield's time, the image and the magazine represented contested media. Today, these methods of communication are associated closely with the distribution of neo-liberal ideology, a situation the AMF challenges by appropriating these media for its own purpose. It releases the image and the glossy magazine from the service of this particular social, cultural, and economic position by defying conventions of these methods of mass communication and exploring contradictions in form as well as in content. For example, *Adbusters* breaks rules of technique by using simultaneously highly polished and amateur-like, cut-and-paste design elements. The glossy cover, high-quality photographic images and a traditional magazine format, juxtaposed and combined with the reproductions of coffee stains, wrinkled paper and careless handwriting in blue pen and black markers, give the magazine an appearance that is unusual in the magazine world.[29] Together, the look and the revolutionary message of the magazine highjack what the mainstream glossy magazine stands for within the context of consumerism.

Turning readers into writers

For Benjamin, the success of revolutionary impulses and the evasion of co-optation do not only depend on structural transformation, but the role of the individual producer and consumer also has to change. By turning readers into writers and thereby moving from only consuming ideas to also producing them, subversive efforts gain force.

Although one of the main goals of the AMF appears to be the turning of readers into writers by encouraging activists to become cultural producers, in practice, how the organization frames its project and follows through contradicts this objective. The AMF website exemplifies this incongruence between what the organization claims to be and what it offers. Although called "Activist Headquarters," the website content is composed of little that would justify this name, as it provides only one how-to guide, "how to create your own print ad,"[30] leaving those seeking practical suggestions for how to participate in the 'cultural revolution' against consumerism empty handed. Besides requests to sign a limited number of petitions, download posters, buy *Adbusters* and other AMF products, activists can find few ideas about how they can become more engaged in social change initiatives. The AMF never makes it its priority to attempt to bring together people face to face so they can pursue local, community initiatives.

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[29] I discuss this form and its relationship to the zine culture in more depth in the first and second chapter.

Besides the apparent lack of commitment to pedagogical work, the very nature of the project makes the merging of reader and writer difficult. The use of media such as images, the Internet, sounds, and video brings with it various implications pertaining to cultural specificity and privileged positioning within the world order. It takes for granted financial, cultural, and educational resources that readers have to possess to enable them to take part in the AMF's activities *passively* or *actively*. Participating passively relates to possessing the cultural capital to interpret parodies of advertisements that appear in public spaces or on television. The AMF takes as a starting point a homogeneous global audience whose interpretation of its image-based communication is analogous. For the AMF magazine, website and other activities to have an impact, its consumers must understand the political messages in a similar fashion, which may explain why the majority of the subscribers of *Adbusters* magazine outside of Canada are located in the U.S., Germany, the U.K. and Australia, countries with comparable socio-economic realities and shared cultural norms. Although the world is increasingly economically globalized, examples in international advertising suggest that culturally homogeneity is not a reality. For instance, Sturken and Cartwright argue that US magazines rejected an advertisement of Italian-based fashion conglomerate Benetton that depicted a black woman breast-feeding a white baby because in the US context, the ad signified the exploitation of black women slaves as wet nurses (2001, 197).

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[30] http://adbusters.org/creativeresistance/spoofads/printad/ (accessed March 30, 2003)

While a passive engagement with the organization's work is clearly limited, active participation, in its direct or indirect form, is restricted to even a smaller group of individuals. Participating actively in AMF projects refers to having the disposable income to purchase such products such as *Adbusters*, the corporate flag and the annual calendar, as well as having access to technologies that permit becoming involved by producing culture jams or contributing to the campaigns and content of the magazine. It then follows that although technology makes the AMF's project successful, it simultaneously undermines its goals, because action is confined to the relatively privileged for whom a choice in consumption is implied. Furthermore, it begins to show that opposition to the system of consumer culture and the construction of alternative discourses such as the AMF propose are narrow in the sense that they lack an inclusive and global perspective.

Politicizing art

By advocating culture jamming, through such methods as the creation of subvertisements and spoof ads, and producing these forms of creative opposition itself, the AMF aims to politicize consumption. Whether this signifies an example of Benjamin's call to politicize art, however, is uncertain. Applying his theoretical assumptions to the AMF lays bare that characterizing creative work as either its politicization or its aestheticization implies a particular ideological position, in part because both share characteristics, like speaking and appealing to the reader, having an aesthetic dimension, and containing political intent. Distinguishing the two is difficult in the case of the AMF, for although it politicizes consumption, the organization also fails to do so in a manner that puts into question the system's foundation, as well as a wide range of its manifestations. Rather than understanding the activities of the AMF as either aestheticizing politics or politicizing art, a better way to describe them is in terms of the two occurring simultaneously; the AMF is involved in the subversion of dominant ideologies of consumer culture as well as its replication.

Having examined the AMF from a Benjaminian perspective, I return directly to the question 'What is the position of the AMF within today's relations of production?' The practical application of this inquiry lies in identifying how the organization can improve its project and what aspects and lessons other progressive social movements can learn from it. From my inquiry arise conflicting conclusions. Although the AMF begins to engage with pressing issues of our time and attempts to do so by communicating with the most powerful media available to us today, it is caught up invariably within mechanisms that replicate contemporary dominant systems that oppress.

Two questions remain unanswered from Benjamin's theoretical insights discussed here and their application to the AMF. First, why have creative people and intellectuals not transformed the systems they supply, thereby actively participating in replicating an oppressive system? Rather than an opening up the creative process to a greater variety of ideas and groups of people, neo-liberal interests continue to expand their hold over the means of mass communication, limiting tremendously the type of information disseminated. Consequently, the second question that continues to stand is: Considering temporary ideological and economic conditions, how can producers of creative works transform production processes and change how these products are consumed with the aim to democratize them?

MAX HORKHEIMER AND THEODOR W. ADORNO: IN THE CHAINS OF CULTURE INDUSTRY

> *The total effect of culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment, in which, as Horkheimer and I have noted, enlightenment, that is the progressive technical domination of nature, becomes mass deception and is turned into a means for fettering consciousness.*
>
> Adorno [1975]1991, 92

While Benjamin helps to examine how the AMF functions within contemporary relations of production, Horkheimer and Adorno's culture industry theory aids in describing the relationship between the organization's project and consumer culture. Here, I consider the AMF not only as an initiative of opposition but also as a manifestation of consumer culture. At the same time, the similarity between the ideologies both Horkheimer and Adorno's and Lasn's approaches criticize provides the basis for a critical explication the AMF's project. In this context, it is significant to note that the AMF alludes to the Horkheimer and Adorno's concept in its manifestos published in *Adbusters* since 1997. The organization declares itself as aiming to "change the way … *culture industries* set their agendas" (*Adbusters* manifestos; italics add). Applying Horkheimer and Adorno's argument regarding the culture industry to the AMF not only helps us appreciate its continuing relevance but also brings into sharp relief the difficulties involved in formulating alternatives to dominant ideologies. Furthermore, it lays bare sources of contradiction within the AMF's activities, problematizing the group's use of consumerist platforms in propagating its message.

Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of culture industry has received much criticism for its economic determinism and apparent lack of space and potential for agency, in particular from the postmodern camp. Some contemporary social scientists argue that this top-down model of mass media no longer has any relevance today. For example, Bernstein writes: " '[C]ulture industry' has served the proponents of postmodernism as a negative image against which their claims for a democratic transformation of culture may be secured" (1991, 1). Douglas Kellner describes the current academic position of Horkheimer and Adorno's work as follows:

> In recent years the Frankfurt School, and especially Adorno, has served as an ideal-type of an approach that homogenizes mass culture, reifies its audience as cultural dupes, and serves as a strawman of a one-dimensional and reductive approach to mass culture that an allegedly more sophisticated cultural studies should overcome. (Kellner 1997,145)

An example of this perception is Sturken and Cartwright's argument:

> [T]here is no longer one mass audience. Rather, the populace is fragmented among a range of cultures and communities, some of which may respond to art and media in ways that challenge or even transform the dominant meanings

> generated by the mainstream culture industry (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 168).

Others defend Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of culture industry, particularly its contemporary relevance. Bernstein writes:

> If the surface logic of the culture industry is significantly different from the time of Adorno's writing, its effects are uncannily the same. Adorno saw clearly the trajectory of the culture industry and the threat it posed. That his most pessimistic predictions have come to pass makes his writings on the culture industry uncomfortably timely (Bernstein 1991, 23).

He concludes that the "understanding of Adorno's critical theory may lead to a more nuanced evaluation of the claims of postmodernism" (1991, 2). Kellner also emphasizes the bearing this conception of culture in late capitalism has on present day conditions. He writes:

> Once one has appropriated Adorno's vision, one finds his ideas instantiated and confirmed over and over, day after day. One has lost one's innocence, one finds one's self distanced from media culture, detects standardization, pseudo-individualism, stereotypes and schemata, and the baleful effects of cultural commodification and reification. In a postmodern scene that celebrates the active audience, that finds resistance everywhere, that ritualistically acclaims the popular, Adorno is thus a salutatory counterforce. (Kellner 1997, 146)

Deborah Cook stresses that Adorno's work on culture industry does not fundamentally lack a conception of emancipatory potential.

> Adorno did not believe that individuals were the passive objects of an overwhelming system of socio-economic domination and control. In fact, he saw quite clearly that in late capitalist societies, individuals were deceiving *themselves* about the social order and the culture industry which reproduces and reinforces it. This self-deception can be made conscious (Cook 1996, 52).

Adorno discusses the topic of culture industry in "On the Social Situation of Music (1932) and "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), a polemic against Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." However, the most famous treatment of the term comes from the chapter "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), written with Max Horkheimer while living in Hollywood in the early 1940s. The central claim of this work is that the same rationality that emancipates humankind from the bondage of mythic powers and provides the tools to control nature, simultaneously embodies a return to myth and new, even more absolute and complete forms of domination.

Before beginning with a brief summary of aspects of Horkheimer and Adorno's work particularly relevant to a study of the AMF, an examination of the authors' semantic choice of their key concept provides a significant insight into its theoretical claims. Horkheimer and Adorno reject the term 'mass culture' as an illusory suggestion of natural and unplanned popularity. Clarifying this choice, Adorno writes in "Culture Industry Reconsidered":

> We replaced that expression with 'culture industry' in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art. (Adorno [1975] 1991, 85)

From this distinction it follows that Horkheimer and Adorno examine cultural forms as commodities, that is, forms to which a profit motive and therefore a particular ideology is attached, and the effects this commodification has on not only culture but also the development of democratic societies.

Horkheimer and Adorno base their work on culture industry on the premise that contrary to contemporary sociological views, society is not defined by cultural chaos, for the system of culture industry provides cohesion and mechanisms for recreating and deepening the ideological system that perpetuates the success of capitalism. They argue that culture "today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 94). In this environment, Marx's notion of an impending proletarian-lead revolution ignited by unbearable economic, political, social, and cultural conditions appeared as unlikely in early 1940s Europe as it does today in the entire western world.

Horkheimer and Adorno's culture industry vis-à-vis the Adbusters Media Foundation's conception of consumer culture

In order to explicate and consequently critique the AMF's project, I draw on conceptual similarities between Horkheimer and Adorno's engagement with culture industry in relationship to how the AMF problematizes consumer culture. For the AMF's position, I rely exclusively on Kalle Lasn's book *Culture Jam*. Before describing overlapping ideas, I point out significant difference between the two approaches.

While Horkheimer and Adorno engage in scholarly theoretical exploration, Lasn's writing is part of a popular social movement discourse. Furthermore, as distinctly situated in history, they represent significantly disparate starting points for a diagnosis of the developmental stage of the phenomena they describe. Horkheimer and Adorno understand culture industry as on an expansionary trajectory, and as having the tendency to increasingly define the desires of the individual. This perspective is implied in the following statement. "The more strongly the culture industry entrenches itself, the more it can do as it chooses with the needs of consumers – producing, controlling, disciplining them." (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 115). In other words, based on their observation of late capitalism in the 1930s and 1940s in Germany and the United States, they theorize future developments of culture in this context. In contrast, Lasn sees the object of his opposition as firmly established; he understands it not as a possibility, but rather as a reality that has totalizing effects. This difference has consequences for the urgency of the authors' words, as well as the potential for and the form of opposition.

The similarities between Horkheimer and Adorno's description of culture industry and Lasn's representation of consumer culture are striking in terms of the defining features both approaches emphasize, particularly its omnipotent and insidious nature. This underlying character is of particular importance, because it is tied to controlling and limiting severely the individual's ability to exercise subjectivity. In Adorno's words, culture industry "impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves" (Adorno [1975] 1991, 93). Other parallel themes include ascribing to the mass media a pivotal role, as well as describing the systems as manipulative, inextricably intertwined with the capitalist economy, and erasing difference in cultural expression.

Central to the phenomena Horkheimer and Adorno and Lasn describe is the all-pervasiveness of a market ideology, one that overpowers all human endeavors, even subsuming every aspect of the cultural and artistic, consequently changing their nature. Horkheimer and Adorno's much quoted statement describing this characteristic reads: "The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry" (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944] 2002, 99). Lasn echoes this sentiment: "A continuous product message has woven itself into the very fabric of our existence" (Lasn 1999, xiii), and, "a numbing sense of commercial artificiality pervades our post-modern era" (1999, xvii). He formulates the goals of his movement in accordance. "We will uncool [Brand America's] fashions and celebrities, its icons, signs and spectacles. And then on the ruins of the old consumer culture, we will build a new one with a noncommercial heart and soul" (1999, xvi).

The ubiquity of the phenomenon the writers describe is significant, for it enables it to have a controlling influence that is overwhelming. Lasn describes the corporate ethos of western culture as a kind of Huxleyan 'soma'[31] (1999, xiii), and consumer culture as a propaganda system that impedes all critical thought. For example:

> The modern consumer is indeed a Manchurian Candidate living in a trance. He has a vague

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[31] Soma is a narcotic that makes people in Huxley's novel *Brave New World* comfortable with their lack of freedom.

> notion that at some point early in his life, experiments were carried out on him, but he can't remember much about them. While he was drugged, or too young to remember, ideas were implanted into his subconscious with a view to changing his behavior. The Manchurian Consumer has been programmed not to kill the president, but to go out and purchase things on one of a number of predetermined commands (Lasn 1999, 41).

The omnipotence of the system and the mechanisms that hamper opposition are intimately connected, as its ubiquity enables it to shut out other options. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno define as a distinctive feature of late capitalism the elimination of alternatives. For them, "[w]hat is new in the phase of mass culture compared to that of late liberalism is the exclusion of the new" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 106). In other words, the effectiveness of the culture industry Horkheimer and Adorno examine, and the consumer culture Lasn condemns, depends not on a parading of an ideology, that is, on disguising their true nature, but in eliminating the thought that there is any alternative to the status quo. Lasn writes: "The great, insidious power of the spectacle lies in the fact that it is actually a form of mental slavery that we are free to resist, only it never occurs to us to do so" (1999: 104). Horkheimer and Adorno describe this characteristic as follows: "What is decisive today is ... the necessity, inherent in the system, of never releasing its grip on the consumer, of not for a moment allowing him or her to suspect that resistance is possible" ([1944] 2002, 113). Late capitalist societies are infused with social mechanisms that actively replicate it, enabling the system to perpetuate itself. "And all [culture industry's] agents, from the producer to the women's organizations, are on the alert to ensure that the simple reproduction of mind does not lead on to the expansion of mind" ([1944] 2002, 100).

Another broad mechanism that propels the success of consumerism and hampers opposition to it, to which both approaches point, is manipulation and deception. For example, Lasn writes: "[A] heavily manipulative corporate ethos drives our culture" (1999, xiii). In culture industry, "[a] cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly" (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944] 2002, 95). The characteristic of pledging more than it can offer reflects the deceptive character of culture industry. Horkheimer and Adorno describe this mechanism in this manner:

> The culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises. The promissory note of pleasure issued by plot and packaging is indefinitely prolonged: the promise, which actually comprises the entire show, disdainfully intimates that there is nothing more to come, that he diner must be satisfied with reading the menu ([1944] 2002, 111).

For Lasn, the manipulative character of consumer culture goes hand in hand with how mass media operates. According to him, "[w]e are being manipulated in the most insidious way. Our emotions, personalities and core values are under siege from media and cultural forces too complex to decode.... The human spirit of prideful contrariness and fierce independence has been oddly tamed" (Lasn 1999, xiii). He also writes, "our media-saturated postmodern world, where all communication flows in one direction, from the powerful to the powerless, produces a population of lumpen spectators" (1999, 104). Below, I expand on the role of the media, a key component in the phenomena both Lasn and Horkheimer engage with in their frameworks.

Characterizing consumer culture as manipulative implies that an entity other than the ordinary individual produces culture, thereby negating its real, authentic production and diminishing its quality. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno see a "[w]ithering of imagination and spontaneity in the consumer of culture today" ([1944] 2002, 100). Those in control of the means of production of culture "produce or let pass nothing which does not conform to their tables, to their concept of the consumer, or above all, to themselves" ([1944] 2002. 96). The resulting culture industry is "the purposeful integration of its consumers from above" (Adorno [1975], 1991, 85). For Lasn, the force that makes life worth living is "what consumer capitalism takes away from you every time it sells you brand-name 'cool' as this month's rebel attitude" (Lasn

1999, 106). He describes the symptoms of the production of culture from above that manifest themselves in one's everyday life as follows:

> Our stories, once passed from one generation to the next by parents, neighbors and teachers, are now told by distant corporations with 'something to sell as well as to tell.' Brands, products, fashions, celebrities, entertainments – the spectacles that surround the production of culture – are our culture now. Our role is mostly to listen and watch-and then, based on what we have heard and seen, to buy. (Lasn 1999, xiii)

and

> Capitalism's consumer culture cannibalizes your spirit over time, it puts you to work as an obedient 'slave component' of the system without your ever even knowing it.
> Imagine you're flaked out on the couch watching TV. You're very relaxed, the way a hypnotized patient is relaxed. Gradually, you feel your energy, or at least your desire to do anything but continue to watch, this is less than blissful. After a few hours you know something is wrong. You want to get up, but can't. You think you might be going crazy. Someone is doing this to you. Someone is sucking you dry. But who? (Lasn 1999, 141)

Positioning cultural production as a process planned from above and taking place outside of the individual has further implications. Specifically, both approaches lament the disappearance of variation in cultural expression. Horkheimer and Adorno describe emphatically the homogenization of culture in late capitalism:

> All mass culture under monopoly is identical ([1944] 2002, 95).
>
> Through totality, the culture industry is putting an end to [the unruliness of cultural works] ([1944] 2002, 99).
>
> For the consumer there is nothing left to classify, since the classification has already been preempted by the schematism of production ([1944] 2002, 98).

> The details of the products of culture industry are interchangeable (ibid.).
>
> Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous together ([1944] 2002, 94).

Lasn's thoughts approximate those of Horkheimer and Adorno.

> Cultural homogenization has graver consequences than the same hairstyles, catchphrases, music and action-hero antics perpetrated ad nauseam around the world. In all systems, homogenization is poison. Lack of diversity leads to inefficiency and failure. The loss of language, tradition or heritage – or the forgetting of one good idea – is as big a loss to future generations as a biological species going extinct. (Lasn 1999, 26)

For Lasn, however, the source is not the global system of a capitalist economy, but rather consumer culture as emanating from the United States. He writes: "Communities, traditions, cultural heritages, sovereignties, whole histories are being replaced by a barren American monoculture" (Lasn 1999, xiv). Unlike Lasn, Horkheimer and Adorno understand culture industry as systemic, as a form of culture that exists in all liberal industrial countries (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944] 2002, 105). In other words, culture industry exists wherever capitalism has reached a particular stage in its development.

Although both the culture industry and the consumer culture approach identify the homogenization of culture, an all persuasive character of the ideology that controls and manipulates individuals and eliminates alternative conceptions of culture and society as defining features, they diverge in their assessment of the breadth and depth of the phenomenon. By describing culture industry as an aspect of late capitalism, Horkheimer and Adorno's theory brings with it different implications for the form of and potential for subversion than Lasn's conception, one that perceives consumer culture as emanating from a particular geographical location.

Horkheimer and Adorno's approach give parts of their work an overwhelmingly pessimistic character with respect to the potential to exercise agency. For example, they write:

> Culture has always contributed to the subduing of revolutionary as well as of barbaric instincts. Industrial culture does something more. It inculcates the conditions on which implacable life is allowed to be lived at all. Individuals must use their general satiety as a motive for abandoning themselves to the collective power of which they are sated. ([1944] 2002, 126)

and

> Anyone who resists [culture industry] can survive only by being incorporated. Once registered as diverging from the culture industry, they belong to it as the land reformer does to capitalism. Realistic indignation is the trademark of those with a new idea to sell. Public authority in the present society allows only those complaints to be heard in which the attentive ear can discern the prominent figure under whose protection the rebel is suing for peace. ([1944] 2002, 104).

Consequently, the system of culture industry is ubiquitous and persuasive to such a high degree, that "any need which might escape the central control is repressed by that of individual consciousness" ([1944] 200, 95). In effect, what Horkheimer and Adorno describe is a complete alienation from the self. Culture industry manipulates and reformulates the individual's conscious and unconscious composition to the very core, producing a compliant subject. "The culture industry is the societal realization of the defeat of reflection; it is the realization of subsumptive reason, the unification of the many under one" (Bernstein 1991, 9). As I have mentioned above, this particularly pessimistic aspect in the theory of culture industry that implies a severe restriction for the exercising of opposition cannot be reduced to an interpretation of its absolute impossibility and a critique of the work in its entirety. Rather, this type of analysis has to consider the goal of the work. Horkheimer and Adorno's work emphasizes a description of the mechanisms and ideology that inverts the ideals of the enlightenment in late capitalism. Bernstein stresses that Adorno, in his writings on culture industry, is not

> attempting an objective sociological analysis... Rather, the question of the culture industry is raised from the perspective of its relation to the possibilities for social transformation. The culture industry is to be understood from the perspective of its potentialities for promoting or blocking 'integral freedom.' (Bernstein 1999, 2)

Deborah Cook describes Adorno's culture industry project as an effort "to account for the standardization and homogenization of contemporary culture" and describing "how the culture industry promotes capitalism through its ideology" (Cook 1996, x). She also notes that Adorno "appeared to be far more interested in describing the nature of domination than in assessing the potential for resistance to it" (1996, 52). Lasn does not pursue the same theoretical goals as do Horkheimer and Adorno. Rather, as a leading figure of a social movement, he is concerned with providing motivation for subversive action.

In his assumed position, Lasn has to be pragmatic. On the one hand, there exists an oppressive system that, in his words, destroys the mental and natural environment. On the other hand, Lasn has to present a solution, that is, ways to oppose and emancipate. In his role as proponent of cultural resistance, Lasn believes that by engaging in culture jamming as a subversive practice, one can overcome the ideological confines of consumer culture and approximate becoming an authentic being. For example, he writes: "Many culture jammers take daily leaps of faith, or of courage – acts that take them outside market-structured consciousness long enough to get a taste of real living" (Lasn 1999, 106).

To summarize, while Horkheimer and Adorno's work puts into question the late capitalist system in its totality, Lasn in comparison offers merely reformative changes. Horkheimer and Adorno see media fundamentally as a manifestation of culture industry in particular, and the late capitalist system in general. For example, they argue that what propels culture industry's progress "stems from the general laws of capital" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 105). Frederic Jameson's description of culture industry makes this point even clearer:

> [The theory of culture industry is] not a theory of culture but the theory of an *industry*, of a branch of the interlocking monopolies of late capitalism that makes money out of what used to be called culture. The topic here is the commercialization of life (1990, 144).

Whereas culture industry describes the integration of the individual into the exchange principle, Lasn presents mass media as the primary promoter of consumerism, as merely a point of weakness in a system that functions well in most regards. Consequently, he is only willing to remove the profit motive from cultural production and consumption, while approving of the capitalist system in general. In other words, Lasn fails to understand the ideology of consumer culture as a structurally necessary aspect of capitalist accumulation, that is, as a solution to over-production crisis. By relentlessly ascribing to American corporate interest the role of culprit in propagating consumerism and commodifying culture, he arrives at a conception of the problem that is far too narrow, thereby undermining its magnitude. This position allows in practice, as exemplified below, that profit is beginning to play a significant role in one of the latest AMF campaigns, the BlackSpot sneaker.

Horkheimer, Adorno and Lasn on advertising

> *In culture industry, advertising becomes "l'art pour l'art, advertising for advertising's sake, the pure representation of social power.*
> Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 132

Although Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of the scope of the phenomena they grapple with surpasses that of Lasn, both approaches problematize mass media as key players. For Lasn, "there's a lack of media space in which to challenge consumptive, commercial and corporate agendas" (Lasn 1999, 33). At the same time, consumerism and mass media go hand in hand. "America, and much of the rest of the world now, is caught in a media-consumer trance" (1999, xvii). Lasn also describes the mass media as the dispenser of the Huxleyan 'soma' to which he compares consumer culture (1999: xiii).

Advertising in particular receives harsh criticism from Horkheimer and Adorno and Lasn. In spite of this, the Horkheimer and Adorno's views of advertising's role and its relationship with culture within late capitalism give insight into why the AMF's use of ads is fraught with contradiction. For Horkheimer and Adorno, advertisements represent an integral component of the mass deception that is the culture industry. Beyond the direct implication of making use of a consumerist platform, examining the deeper significance of the unity between culture and advertising begins to unravel the uncertainty of the AMF's efficacy in their attack on consumer culture.

Horkheimer and Adorno describe advertising as culture industry's "elixir of life" ([1944] 2002, 131). However, the relationship between advertising and culture lies deeper than the role of the former as life force of the latter. Because culture is a commodity, it merges with advertising. Consequently, the two exist in a reciprocal relationship that also makes them the same. Horkheimer and Adorno write: "But because [culture industry's] product ceaselessly reduces the pleasure it promises as a commodity to that mere promise, it finally coincides with the advertisement it needs on account of its own inability to please" ([1944] 2002,131). This characteristic also represents they key to the success of late capitalism. The victory of advertising in culture industry lies in that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them. "That is the triumph of advertising in the culture industry: the compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which, at the same time, they recognize as false" ([1944] 2002, 136). They know that ads are deceptive, incessantly making pledges that are incapable of fulfilling yet they actively perpetuate, and make an ideological investment into, the system.

When advertising first emerged in the industrializing world, it informed the customer of available products. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, it no longer fulfills this function. Rather, it "strengthens the bond which shackles consumers to the big combines" (([1944] 2002, 131). Culture industry restricts advertising to entities that are already powerful players.

"Only those who can keep paying the exorbitant fees charged by the advertising agencies, ... that is those who are already part of the system or are co-opted into it by the decisions of banks and industrial capital, can enter the pseudomarket as sellers" (ibid.). The high cost of advertising acts as a gatekeeper by controlling who becomes and continues to be a powerful participant in the market. At the same time, it represents a self-perpetuating system that transforms expenditures back into revenues. Moreover, it ensures replication and continuation by repressing alternatives. In Horkheimer and Adorno's words, "advertising today is a negative principle, a blocking device: anything which does not bear its seal of approval is economically suspect" (ibid.).

The nearly seamless blending of commercial and non-commercial materials in magazines represents the ability of ads to camouflage themselves, that is, to make themselves look as though they *are* the content and lack a commercial claim. Horkheimer and Adorno observed even in their time that in the "influential American magazines *Life* and *Fortune* the images and texts of advertisements are, at a cursory glance, hardly distinguishable from the editorial section" (([1944] 2002, 132). In this context, they even see advertisements as superior to editorial content. They write: "(A)dvertising pages rely on photographs and data so factual and lifelike that they represent the ideal of information to which the editorial section only aspires" (ibid.).

The reader of *Adbusters* is already familiar with the barely distinguishable difference between editorial and advertisement content that Horkheimer and Adorno describe, a characteristic that is far more ubiquitous today than during their time. In the magazine, ads, ad-like images, and the remainder of its content merge entirely. For example, the placement of "real" ads, such as ones for the American Army is common. At the same time, however, Lasn is exceptionally critical of advertising as it exists today. He describes advertisements as "the most prevalent and toxic of mental pollutants" (Lasn 1999, 18). For him, corporate advertising specifically, and commercial media in general, is "the largest single psychological project ever undertaken by the human race" (Lasn 1999,19). The following excerpts from his book illustrate this view further.

> The proliferation of commercial messages has happened so steadily and relentlessly that we haven't quite woken up to the absurdity of it all. No longer are ads confined to the usual places: buses, billboards, stadiums. Anywhere your eyes can possibly come to rest is now a place that, in corporate America's view, can and ought to be filled with a logo or product message (ibid.).
>
> This flood of psycho-effluent is spreading all around us, and we love every minute of it. The adspeak means nothing. It means worse than nothing. It is "anti-language' that, whenever it runs into truth and meaning, annihilates it. There is nowhere to run. No one is exempt an no one will be spared (1999, 21).

Using the examples of Benetton and Calvin Klein ads, Lasn argues that advertising today is leading to an erosion of empathy, a process that even advertisers are unaware of or understand. Ads "inure us to the suffering (or joy) of other people. They engender an attitude of malaise toward the things that make us most human. We pretend not to care as advertisers excavate the most sacred parts of ourselves, and we end up actually not caring" (1999, 23). At the same time, he recognizes that the influence of these persuasive messages has far surpasses their appearance on airwaves and the printed media. He links advertising to the means by which the ideology of consumer culture replicates itself and the mechanism by which corporate influence media content.

> In today's media environment, advertisers rule – the sponsor is king. That ideology is now so entrenched within media circles as to have become an unspoken operational code. Lessons about power, privilege and access are learned at the lower levels by young writers who take this received wisdom with them as they move up the media ladder. From the smallest community weeklies to the big city and national dailies, from *Forbes* and *Details* and *Cosmo* to the NBC, ABC and CBC networks, our whole social communications system is rotten to the core (1999, 35).

Lasn's views about advertising presented above are incongruous with how the AMF uses advertisement-like images. While he pursues an agenda of opening the media to subversive messages, he is interested not in the de-commodification of a common, but rather in ensuring access to those who can afford to pay the exorbitant fees demanded of those in control of them.

The AMF as agent of culture industry

The AMF's discourse of opposition to consumer culture is difficult to pinpoint and define precisely. Although the AMF defines itself as a subversive project and its messages contain overtly anti-capitalist sentiments, it conforms to the system it opposes by speaking its language and using its most vital structures. For example, the slogan that serves as the title for their manifesto contains reads: "Cultural revolution is our business." On one hand, the use of the term *business* functions as a metaphor and as such could read "Cultural revolution is our concern," or " Cultural revolution is what we are all about" with no loss of meaning. On the other hand, ironically, it points to that which undermines the authority of its message. The word business conveys all things related to commercial enterprise and profit. Bearing in mind that the AMF produces texts that imply a high sensitivity to multiple meanings of words and images, this sense cannot be ignored. Rather, it serves as an indicator for the AMF's failure to fundamentally and convincingly challenge not only consumer culture but also the role the mass media plays in its perpetuation. The AMF's project "Media Carta," the manner in which it manufactures and sells activist materials, and the BlackSpot sneaker campaign exemplify this problem more concretely.

Media Carta

With the "Media Carta" campaign, the AMF addresses the issues that led to its establishment, that is, the overwhelming control of mass communication media by mega-corporations either directly or through advertising. In addition, this campaign is motivated by television networks' refusal to air AMF subvertisements. The main thrust of "Media Carta" is the idea that freedom of speech cannot prevail in an environment where limited interests are represented and where gatekeepers shut out oppositional voices. The AMF describes the problem, and the goal involved, as follows:

> Every age has its human-rights battle, and every social movement has to fight one. The civil rights movement, feminism, environmentalism, the global justice movement – each has reshaped the way we understand human freedom.
>
> Media Carta is the human-rights battle of our information age. It is about us, the people, singing the songs and telling the stories and generating culture from the bottom up, instead of having it spoon-fed from the top down.
>
> We need a total revolution in the way we relate to the media. We want access. We want public communications. We want a *fair marketplace* of ideas. (Media Carta 2003; italics added)

Lasn comments that he aims to "find support for the idea of giving some airtime – maybe two minutes per hour – back to the people. I call this the 'Two-minute Media Revolution,' a first-come, first-served system of free TV access for individuals, communities, and groups" (Jensen 2001). At the same time, the organization perpetuates the notion that only those who have sufficient financial resources have access to this common via the placement of advertisements. Lasn is fighting "not to have freedom of opinion and freedom of speech, but actually have access: to be able to buy airtime on TV" (Schmelzer 2003). The "Media Carta" campaign, with its goal to create a 'fair marketplace of ideas' and enable anyone who has and is willing to spend the money to 'buy airtime on TV' makes explicit that the AMF fails to fundamentally challenge corporate ownership of the airwaves by failing to describe them as a common, that is, a resource owned by all that is reclaimable. This position becomes particularly explicit when considering that the AMF itself supports corporate media and the system they are part of by placing ads for its BlackSpot campaign in the New York Times on July 3, 2003 at a cost of $ 47.000 (BlackSpot Sneaker 2004). I will expand on this below.

Cut-and-paste activism

Both Horkheimer and Adorno's and Lasn's critique of culture in late capitalism includes the notion that culture is produced from the top rather than the bottom, thereby falsifying it. The way in which the AMF practices its project is incongruous with this perspective. Rather than exploring the many ways individuals can take cultural production into their own hands, the AMF restricts and prescribes it. In particular, those who have the technical resources for graphic design and submit work to the organization find themselves in a preferred position. Most significantly, the AMF hampers creative resistance by defining the problems of consumer culture narrowly by providing readers with activist materials in a form of cut-and-paste.

Specifically, rather than offering its audience and followers guides for how to make create their own content and create media that will serve as platforms, they supply ready made spoofs and activist materials that require only the use of a printer or scissors and some tape. One example appears in the "Design Anarchy" issue (September/October 2001). Here the reader finds a red and yellow bow-shaped sign with the words "The more you consume the less you live." A line and scissors, the symbol for a 'cut-out,' surround it. Underneath, *Adbusters* provides an example of where this sign could be posted, namely on a store door (*Adbusters* September/October 2001, 106). The "Appetite" issue (November/December 2002) also contains ready-to-cut-out labels. These pre-made labels read: "For school vending machines + principal's door," "my school: a junk food free zone," and "are you losing your thirst for bubbly, brown, sugar water?" This trend of taking creativity out of creative resistance and merely labeling objects continues in a tour-de-force in the "Unbrand America" campaign, which I discuss below. AMF's approach to activism in this form indicates the organization's perception of and relationship to its audience/markets. It fails to acknowledge the reader's ability to be critically creative and is satisfied with calling forth boredom and little more than passing interest.

Building the Adbusters brand: From anti-consumption activism to peddling sneakers

The AMF exemplifies the difficulty that lies in distinguishing an anti-brand from a mainstream commercial brand, a task that becomes increasingly complex with the rising ubiquity of ethical branding. Lasn himself admits that the AMF engages in branding. In a conversation about the spoof-ad of Tiger Woods whose smile is shaped like a Nike swoosh, he comments, "It's like branding" (Pickerel et al. 2002).

As part of marketing itself and building its brand, the AMF sells products. The admirers of the organization can buy Kalle Lasn's book ($15), videos, calendars ($7.50 each, or two for $10), gift cards (15 for $10), the corporate flag ($25), and the magazine itself (one year subscription: $35, two year subscription $48 – includes a free set of seven spoof ad postcards). These products represent outward, public signs of an activist identity that requires no investment of critical thought that would contribute to changing how "culture industries set their agendas." [32] The AMF corporate flag in particular puts into question the purpose of these products. In its design, it follows the American flag. However, instead of the stars, the left hand corner is filled with icons of thirty large corporations, such as Taco Bell, Playboy, Adidas, and McDonalds. Although recognizable, the logos fail to represent the complex structure of corporations, their subsidiaries, and the most powerful economic players, namely financial institutions.

The "Unbrand America" campaign further illustrates in what ways the AMF is unable to step outside of the logic of consumer culture/culture industry. Specifically, it points to that there can be no such thing as a no-logo or anti-logo and that in fact, publicity is a space immune to negation. "Unbrand America" involves a marketing and branding campaign that looks very much like any ordinary product marketing campaign. At its centre stands the so-called anti-logo, the black spot, an icon that essentially functions like a politically charged trademark. The black spot is a naively painted black circle that the AMF intends as signature of the "cultural revolution" this organization claims to be involved in. The significance of the black spot is described as follows:

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[32] From AMF manifesto published in *Adbusters* magazine.

> In the coming months a black spot will pop up everywhere . . . on store windows and newspaper boxes, on gas pumps and supermarket shelves. Open a magazine or newspaper - it's there. It's on TV. It stains the logos and smears the nerve centers of the world's biggest, dirtiest corporations. This is the mark of the people who don't approve of Bush's plan to control the world, who don't want countries "liberated" without UN backing, who can't stand anymore neo-con bravado shoved down their throats. This is the mark of the people who want the Kyoto Protocol for the environment, who want the International Criminal Court for greater justice, who want a world where all nations, including the U.S.A., are free of weapons of mass destruction, and who pledge to take their country back. (Unbrand America 2003)

The BlackSpot made its first appearance on a sneaker in the September/October 2001 (No. 37) “Design Anarchy” issue of *Adbusters* (pages 116/117). The issue following that one has a hole punched through it. It also contains a white, postcard sized piece of paper with a large black dot on it. Juxtapositions of the black spot and a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi fasting in protest against British rule after his release from prison in Poona, India, in March 1933 appear in the July/August 2003 issue (pages 24/25). The same issue also contains a black spot sticker. The May/June issue includes a CD decorated with the black spot and titled with the Situationist slogan “Live without dead time.”

The black spot is not perfectly round, therefore giving it the appearance of having been hand-drawn rather than computer generated. It embodies one of the most simple logo designs, which makes it easily replicable. Bearing this characteristic in mind, it is particularly ironic that those interested can download various sizes of the black spot as a PDF file from the Internet,[33] thereby again taking the creativity out of the creative resistance AMF claims to promote.

The AMF launched the "BlackSpot Sneaker" campaign as part of "Unbrand America," providing their now established logo, at least among its readers, with a marketable product. The BlackSpot sneaker illustrates even better than any example discussed above that AMF does not step out of the market ideology it claims to oppose, but rather engages in a form of niche marketing. The BlackSpot sneaker introduces to the AMF's activities a more blatant economic motive than any of its other endeavors. In the organization's words, the BlackSpot sneaker will help to "usher in a more grass roots version of capitalism" (BlackSpot Sneaker 2004).

The BlackSpot sneaker looks like the tremendously popular Converse Chuck Taylor, the basketball shoe first launched in 1923. Instead of the Converse logo, it carries the AMF equivalent, the BlackSpot, that is in actuality a white spot. The AMF presents the BlackSpot sneaker as alternative to Nike shoes, one of the reasons the organization calls the sneaker the "unswoosher." Interestingly, Nike purchased Converse in 2003. Lasn comments on taking the production of the sneaker to a developing country:

> I know from personal experience that many of those factories that campus people dismiss as sweatshop labor are actually very good factories, and that the people who live near those factories are just yearning to work in those factories. A good part of those sweatshop people are seriously misguided. (Baker 2003)

Lasn describes the reason for pursuing the manufacturing of the sneaker as follows: "We got tired of all the lefty whining and the boycotting. It wasn't making any difference" (ibid.). He believes that the BlackSpot sneaker will "redefine capitalism." Once it has produced the first 10,000 shoes, AMF plans to spend $500.000 on promoting its sneaker (ibid.). In effect, the AMF is now engaged in an activity that involves fighting a brand with another brand without having challenged consumer culture at all.

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[33] www.unbrandamerica.org/poster/unbrandamerica_stickers.pdf

The advertising for the BlackSpot sneaker itself has already begun. The back cover of *Adbusters* traditionally carries subvertisements. With the September/October 2003 and March/April 2004 issues, however, readers do not find this familiar feature. Rather, they are faced with a genuine ad for the BlackSpot sneaker (see fig. 4.1). The March/April 2004 edition in particular is filled with numerous ads for the sneaker, erasing unequivocally the difference between the subvertisement and the advertising and thereby moving from social to corporate marketing.

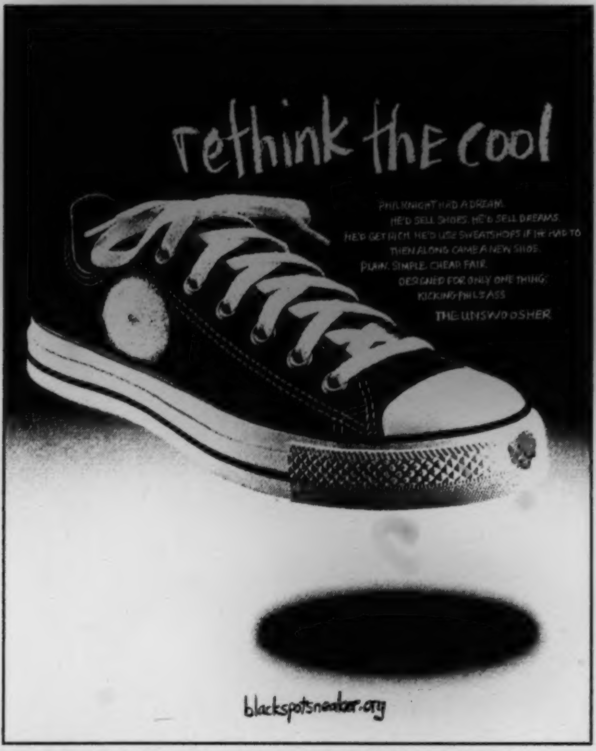
rethink the cool
PHIL KNIGHT HAD A DREAM.
HE'D SELL SHOES. HE'D SELL DREAMS.
HE'D GET RICH. HE'D USE SWEATSHOPS IF HE HAD TO
THEN ALONG CAME A NEW SHOE.
PLAIN. SIMPLE. CHEAP. FAIR.
DESIGNED FOR ONLY ONE THING:
KICKING PHIL'S ASS
THE UNSWOOSHER
blackspotsneaker.org

Fig. 4.1 Ad for the BlackSpot sneaker (*Adbusters* Mar/Apr 2004, back cover)

The AMF advertises a pair of BlackSpot sneakers at a cost of $60. At an estimated production cost of $300,000 for the first 10,000 pairs, the cost of one pair of BlackSpot sneakers lies at $30, resulting in a 100% profit margin (Patriquin 2003). This profit is necessary in part because in order to make the sneaker popular the AMF believes it has pursue advertising in such spaces as the New York Times.

The slogan of the sneaker campaign is “rethink the cool.” Lasn describes the wearing of the BlackSpot sneaker accordingly:

> [I]f you’re wearing that shoe of ours, you’re actually wearing more of an idea than you’re wearing a shoe. You’re basically an ad for a different kind of capitalism. … I don’t see any reason why we can’t develop some sort of anti-

> brand that has its own *cool* and its own incredible power. (Schmelzer 2003; italics added)

By focusing on the cool, and in effect redefining it, AMF is engaging in popularizing a form of hip consumerism that inevitably cannot fundamentally challenge capitalism as an economic system. Thomas Frank describes this aspect of consumption in late capitalism as follows: "Not only does hip consumerism recognize the alienation, boredom, and disgust engendered by the demands of modern consumer society, but it makes of those sentiments powerful imperatives of brand loyalty and accelerated consumption" (Frank 1997, 231).

One of the skeptics of the branding the AMF undertakes is Naomi Klein. In a Globe and Mail article she comments: "Writers and publications who analyze the commercialization and privatization of our lives have a responsibility to work to protect spaces where we aren't constantly being pitched to. This can be undermined if they are seen as simply shilling for a different, 'anti-corporate' brand" (Patriquin 2003). Lasn disagrees: "[I]f we are actually able to launch an anti-brand, then the empowerment around the black spot is actually a real kind of empowerment: the power of us the people to have a business climate that is to our liking. It's the most beautiful kind of empowerment" (BlackSpot sneaker 2004).

Lucy Michaels of the campaign group Corporate Watch also voices ambiguous feeling towards this project:

> While the anti-swoosh marketing idea is genius, it's still a marketing idea to make us choose one product over another. We can choose the red show or the blue shoe or the fairly-traded shoe. If we really want to make the world a fairer place and end exploitation, we have to question the underlying structure by which we produce and consume. (Aitch 2003)

Klein and Michael's critiques of the AMF point to the organization's blurring of the distinction between commercial culture, a realm colonized by the exchange principle and instrumentality, and popular culture, a sphere untainted by the commodity form. It is this merging in their work of the two forms of culture, blatant in the case of the BlackSpot sneaker, that fundamentally undermines the effectiveness and appeal of their project.

While some scholars understand commercial culture as a subset of popular culture (Danna 1992; McQuade and Williamson 1998), Jib Fowles argues that, although they share many attributes, commercial "is a categorically different sort of symbolic content" than popular culture (1996, 11). Matthew P. McAllister (2003) shares this view, but also considers the impact commercial culture has on specific forms of popular culture. On the contrary, Stephen Duncombe (1997) in his discussion of zines as underground culture he argues for the importance of the distinction between the two forms of culture. For him, popular culture is participatory and authentic. On the contrary, commercial culture is manufactured to be popular. He contends that

> Commercial culture is not popular culture. It may be popular, but its popularity is a means to an end: that of being a profitable commodity. As a result, fans are continually betrayed in their quest to make the culture theirs, and the process of connection must be continually reinvented, ad infinitum. (Duncombe 1997, 113)

The debate about the relationship between popular and commercial culture is unimportant in respect to many cultural projects. However, in the context of AMF, which defines itself not as any ordinary cultural project but rather one that opposes consumer culture, this merging of commercial and popular culture weakens it. In campaigns such as "Media Carta," "Unbrand America" and cut-and-paste activism, the AMF is thinking within the box of established corporate media structures. Rather than working on constructing organic media webs and participatory culture, it is concerned with making room for itself in them.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION – TOWARD CRITICAL MEDIA PEDAGOGY

The AMF attempts to make visible the ideological dimension of signification by creating discourses that pull the reader into a dialogue about the construction of meaning. Consequently, the work of the AMF ideally lies in disentangling the hegemonic codes through which meaning is organized. However, by explicitly rejecting an in-depth critique of capitalist economic relations of production and consumption and their social and cultural implications, the AMF fails to expose fully the ideological character of consumerism as well as its underlying mechanisms.

In this thesis, I have suggested that the AMF's efforts to confront the system of consumption head-on have been hampered by its borrowing of consumerist platforms as vehicles for its messages. Their utilization not only precludes comprehensive criticism but it also gives rise to contradictions within its project, both of which weaken the activism's significance and emancipatory potential. Even if these tensions were merely the reflection of the spirit of our time and the growing pains of a movement in formation as Wettergren suggests (see introduction), another one of the AMF's characteristics contributes further to undermining the impact of the organization's activism. By concentrating many of its efforts on the creation of artifacts that function and look much like spectacle, the organization is failing to pursue adequately a radical critical media pedagogy, one that could truly help ignite a transformation in the production and consumption of culture.

Both Douglas Kellner and Henry Giroux engage with the topic of what role pedagogy has to play in the development of progressive democratic societies. Many of their ideas share similarities with those of Benjamin about alternative forms of cultural production, such as refunctioning, polytechnical abilities, and the roles of teaching and new technologies.

Giroux argues that corporate media culture is shaping our culture and everyday life, as well as institutions such as schooling and cultural sites like museums, theme parks, and shopping centers (1994, 2000). He sees the social as being destabilized in part through "niche marketing which constructs identities around lifestyles, ethnicity, fashion, and a host of other commodified subject positions" (Giroux 1994, 23). Moreover, Giroux asserts that where consumer culture prevails, the survival of critical public cultures are at stake.

To respond to this reality, he calls for a political critique of ideological cultural texts, one that takes seriously culture as a site of pedagogy and the construction of our sense of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other elements of contemporary experience and practice. Giroux has in mind the merging of critical pedagogy and cultural studies, culminating in a critical cultural pedagogy, an approach that that he believes will be able to disclose how cultural texts are constructed and help people to dissect and interpret critically media representations, narratives, and their effects (Giroux 1994).

Giroux juxtaposes postmodern pedagogy contained within contemporary advertisements and other products of the consumer culture with critical pedagogy, a form of political activism that "refers to a deliberate attempt by cultural workers to influence how knowledge and subjectivities are produced within particular social relations" (1994, 30). In other words, Giroux puts the challenge of revitalizing critical public cultures not only into the hands of intellectuals but rather calls *all* cultural workers and other progressive educators to action (Giroux 1994). This broad conception of who should engage in critical cultural pedagogy indicates precisely one of the points of the AMF's weakness, for this organization restricts its pursuits to a 'small progressively' thinking group.

Giroux sets a new agenda for cultural workers, one that includes an engagement with, and understanding of how power functions in defining desires and identities. Creating multiple points of antagonism and struggle represents a necessary step in this process. This becomes possible with the formulation of

> guiding narratives that link global and local social contexts, provide new articulations for engaging popular culture within rather than outside new technologies and regimes of representation, and offer a moral language for expanding the struggle over democracy and citizenship to ever-widening spheres of daily life. (Giroux 1994, 23)

This broad program of critique and renewal Giroux formulates is also present in Kellner's vision for the relationship between culture, technology, politics, and pedagogy.

Kellner sees as one of the key issues of the future whether "communications and culture are increasingly commodified or are decommodified" (1995, 337). He argues that cultural studies does not address this topic sufficiently and has been "negligent of developing strategies and practices for media intervention and the production of alternative media" (1995, 135). Furthermore, cultural studies fails to "discern the importance of media and cultural politics" (1995, 337). Kellner also contends that dominant schools of contemporary theory, such as the Frankfurt School, cultural studies, and most postmodern theory, have failed to develop a critical media pedagogy. The development of critical media pedagogy requires an approach that includes

> teach[ing] ourselves and others how to critically decode media messages and ... trace[ing] their complex range of effects. It is important to be able to perceive the various ideological voices and codes in the artifacts of our common culture and to distinguish between hegemonic ideologies and those images, discourses, and text that subvert the dominant ideologies. (Kellner 1995, 337)

Embracing the latest technologies and cultural trends represents a significant aspect in this process. Kellner writes: "... we need to consciously come to terms with our new technologies and culture and devise ways to use them to enhance our lives and to make them available to all" (Kellner 1995, 335). At the same time, new roles and functions have to be assigned to intellectuals and all producers of culture, so that they can enable themselves to determine which way the new technologies will be used and develop and whose interest they serve. "The new cyber-intellectuals of the present may not be the organic intellectuals of a class, but we can become technointellectuals of new technologies, cultural experiences, and spaces, charting and navigating through the brave new worlds of media culture and technoculture" (Kellner 1995, 335).

To summarize, both Giroux and Kellner call for a critical media pedagogy that is marked by breadth and depth, embraces the political nature of culture and also creates tools for others to identify and understand oppressive discourses and formulate critical and alternative ones. This approach would not forget about the unequal global distribution of political and economic power and the relationship between the winners and losers of globalized capitalism.

In this thesis, I have shown that the AMF's strategy of using consumerist platforms for its anti-consumerist messages without transforming them fundamentally fails not only as détournement but also as critical media pedagogy. The re-working of signs and social relations of production requires both the creation of new contexts and thought provoking ideas. If the AMF were truly interested in engaging in the process of 'cultural revolution' it would take on and actively pursue the ideas Giroux and Kellner put forth in their work on critical media pedagogy by making their project more comprehensive, dialectical, and global in perspective. The same applies to all other progressive socio-cultural initiatives, including the study of culture in the academy.

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